What Can't be Said

PARADOX AND CONTRADICTION IN EAST ASIAN THOUGHT

YASUO DEGUCHI
JAY L. GARFIELD
GRAHAM PRIEST
ROBERT H. SHARF

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"There is no truth, and even if there were we could not know it, and even if we could know it, we could not articulate it."

Plato, The Gorgias

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Preface

This book was written collectively. Although individual names or groups of names are associated with each chapter, reflecting those who wrote the initial drafts and exercised editorial control over those chapters, each member of the authorial collective was involved with the conception and writing of the entire book, and we take collective responsibility for its contents. We wrote over a period of several years, supported by a series of workshops. We gratefully acknowledge a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation that supported these workshops and this research, as well as additional support from Yale-NUS College, Smith College, the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Graduate School of Letters of Kyoto University. We thank Ms. Grace Kwan, Mr. Ling Ximin, Dr. Takurō Ōnishi, Dr. Reina Saijō, and Ms. Chrissie Bell for assistance in those workshops.

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Finally, we note that all translations are ours unless otherwise stated.

Reference Abbreviations

T. CBETA electronic version of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, eds. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932).

X. CBETA electronic version of the *Shinsan Dainihon Zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai 國書刊行會, 1975–1989).

All Japanese Dōgen quotations are from Mizuno's *Complete Works of Dōgen*.

What Can't Be Said

1
Introduction and Motivation

Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest

Introduction

In this book, we bring together two topics that have never been put together before: dialetheism and East Asian philosophy. We will start by orienting the reader to these two topics. We will then provide some background on Indian Buddhism and briefly survey where our journey will take us. Finally, we will comment on the turn in our last chapter.

Dialetheism

Let us start with dialetheism, since this is a view that is likely to be unfamiliar to many readers.

A *dialetheia* is a pair of statements, A and $\sim A$ (it's not the case that A), which are both true. Alternatively, and equivalently given a natural assumption about how negation works, a dialetheia is a statement, A, that is both true and false. *Dialetheism* is the view that there are some dialetheias. A dialetheist holds that *some* contradictions are true, not (necessarily) that *all* contradictions are true. The view that all contradictions are true is called *trivialism*, and it is a special case.

Dialetheism countenances the violation of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC): the thesis that no contradiction can be true. The PNC has been high orthodoxy in Western philosophy

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since Aristotle's badly flawed but highly influential defense of it in the *Metaphysics*.[1] While there have been some important Western philosophers who rejected the PNC—Hegel is the most obvious example[2]—these have been but isolated voices, at least until recently.[3]

Contemporary dialetheism is closely connected with recent developments in logic, and specifically *paraconsistent logic*. In non-paraconsistent logics, such as the familiar Frege/Russell logic, a contradiction implies everything. Hence, if one countenances any contradiction, one is immediately committed to accepting any proposition whatsoever, and this fuels the reluctance on the part of many philosophers to countenance true contradictions: trivialism is a high price to pay. A paraconsistent logic, on the other hand, is one in which contradictions do not imply everything. In the second half of the 20th century, a number of logicians have shown that paraconsistent logic is viable and indeed useful. Using a paraconsistent logic thus opens the door to the rational acceptability of theories that contain contradictions. These may then reveal metaphysical possibilities that might otherwise go unnoticed, or that might be dismissed out of hand, including, for example, the possibility that reality itself is inconsistent. This is because in a paraconsistent framework, contradictions do not spread, but are localized as "singularities."[4] (We will not go into the logical details here. We decided, as a matter of policy, to keep this book largely free of technical issues. Those interested can find the relevant literature in the references.)

Unsurprisingly, then, we have seen a number of philosophers who have come to endorse contradictory theories about various

[1] For an analysis and discussion of Aristotle's arguments, see Priest 2006, ch. 1.

[2] Though, we note, interpreting Hegel as a dialetheist is certainly contentious. For a defense, see Priest 2019a.

[3] For a more on dialetheism, see Priest 2007a, and Priest, Berto, and Weber 2018.

[4] For more on paraconsistent logic, see, again, Priest 2007a, and Priest, Tanaka, and Weber 2017.

topics. The most high-profile of these concerns paradoxes of self-reference, such as the liar paradox. This is the simplest of a whole family of paradoxes. It concerns the sentence *This sentence is false*. If it is true, it is false; and if it is false, it is true. And, since it is either true or false, as it appears it must be, it follows that it is *both* true and false.

The liar paradox is an ancient and venerable paradox, and it has occasioned much discussion in the history of Western logic. Nearly all the discussions have tried to explain what is wrong with the contradiction-generating reasoning. The lack of success is underscored by the fact that, after some two and a half millennia, there is still no consensus on the matter. A dialetheic approach to the paradox cuts through this tortured history. The reasoning is simply what it appears to be: a sound argument for a true contradiction.[5]

The applications of dialetheism have now gone a long way beyond the paradoxes of self-reference. Let us note briefly a few more examples. One of these concerns the nature of motion and its paradoxes. Dialetheism may be applied to solve some of these. Consider one of Zeno's paradoxes of motion: the Arrow. Take an arrow that is travelling from point *a* to point *b*. Consider any instant of its motion. At that instant, because it *is* an instant, progress made in its journey is zero. But the time of the motion is composed of all the instants in it. At each such instance it makes zero progress. An infinite number of zeros added together (even uncountably infinitely many) is zero. So the progress made on the whole journey is zero: the arrow never moves.

The dialetheic solution is that at every instant it *does* move. The arrow is where it is, but it is also where it is not. Since it is in motion, it is already at a later point of its motion, and maybe also at an earlier point of its motion. Since it makes progress at an instant, it

[5] On the matter of the liar paradox, see Beall and Glanzberg 2017.

can make therefore progress at a sum of instants. Clearly, the analysis is dialetheic.[6]

Another sort of paradox to which dialetheism may be applied—and one which is more relevant to what is to come, since it may deal with inconsistent identities—is the sorites paradox. Sorites paradoxes are paradoxes concerning some predicate which is such that making small changes does not affect its applicability. One famous sorites paradox concerns the Ship of Theseus. Theseus had a ship, call it *a*. Every day, he changed one of the old planks and replaced it with a new plank. After a while, every plank in the ship had been changed. Let us call the resulting ship *b*. Changing one plank of a ship does not affect its identity. So after each day, the ship was still the ship *a*. In particular, $a = b$. However, Theseus, being a careful fellow, kept all the old planks, and it occurred to him to reassemble them, which he did. Clearly, the reassembled ship is *a*. Equally clearly, it is not *b*, since they are in different places, so it is not the case that $a = b$. That is, *a* is and is not *b*. If you are not a dialetheist, this is obviously a problem. If you are, you may just take yourself to be in the presence of another sound argument with a contradictory conclusion.[7]

A final application of dialetheism, and one which will also be very relevant in what is to come, is a paradox of the ineffable. A number of very important Western philosophers have argued that language has its limits: there are things of which we cannot speak. Thus, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant tells us that the categories are not applicable to noumena, such as a thing in itself. Any statement about such a thing would apply the categories, so one cannot speak of such things. Or, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein tells us that statements are about objects. But statements have a form, and form is not an object. Hence, one cannot make statements about form. Or

[6] For what it is worth, this was also Hegel's solution to the paradox. On all these things, see Priest 1987, ch. 12.

[7] Sorites paradoxes and identity are discussed in Priest 2010b.

again, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger tells us that being is not itself *a* being. It follows that one can say nothing about it. For, as he also tells us, to make a statement about anything is to treat it as a being. But as is evident to even a cursory perusal, Kant, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger say much about the things about which they say we cannot talk, if only that we can say nothing about them. If one takes any of these theories to be correct, one therefore has a paradox at the limits of the expressible.

The philosophers in question were, of course, well aware of these contradictions. And each suggested ways in which the contradiction may be avoided. Wittgenstein even resorts to the desperate measure of calling the claims in his book literally meaningless, including, presumably, that one, resulting in further paradox. Though this is not the place to go into the matter, it is not hard to see that these ploys do not work.[8] If one subscribes to one of these positions, a radical, but arguably more sensible, position is simply to accept the contradiction at the limits of thought. So much for the first of our two conjoined topics. Let us move to the second: East Asian philosophy.

East Asian Philosophy

As we have noted, Western philosophical traditions have generally been hostile to dialetheism. Again generally speaking, the Asian philosophical traditions have been less so—though Western commentators on these traditions have been hesitant to endorse dialetheic interpretations of the texts involved for fear of making their favorite philosophers appear irrational, given the interpreters' Aristotle-inspired *horror contradictionis*.

[8] On all of these matters, see Priest 2002. We note that in the end Heidegger finally conceded the dialetheism of his view. See Casati 2016.

Take, for example, South Asian philosophy. Early Indian philosophy is arguably more open to dialetheism than Western philosophy. Various philosophers endorse the thought that some things are both true and false (or neither true nor false, thus endorsing the possibility of truth value gaps, as well as truth value gluts). This idea is often represented in a framework called the *catuṣkoṭi* (four corners), according to which a statement may be true (only), false (only), both, or neither. The framework is deployed by both early Hindu and early Buddhist thinkers. Jain logic utilizes not four but seven semantic valuations! This is their *saptabhaṇgī* (seven-fold categorization), and some of these valuations are clearly dialetheic.[9] Later Indian philosophy is much less dialetheism-friendly. Indeed, under the influence of the orthodox Nyāyā philosophers and the Buddhist epistemologists Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the PNC becomes orthodox in Indian thought around the 6th century CE.[10]

Turning to East Asia, matters are different again. Unencumbered by either Aristotelian or Nyāyā thinking, philosophers were freer to develop and explore contradictory theories. Indeed, many East Asian texts are full of paradoxical-sounding claims.[11] Of course, it would be absurd to suppose that on each such occasion, the author of the text is endorsing a dialetheic view. Such authors are as entitled to metaphor and poetic license as anyone else. Sometimes context may show that the contradiction is simply the penultimate line of some kind of *reductio* argument. Sometimes contradictions may be uttered for their shock value alone, to shake up someone's thinking. That is, they have value as *upāya* (skillful means). And sometimes, if the authors had been more careful, they would have indicated that the contradictory claims were true in different senses.[12]

[9] For further details, see Priest 2007b, 2010.

[10] Aspects of the contradictory nature of early Indian thinking are explored in Garfield and Priest 2003; Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008; and Priest 2018.

[11] In Chinese, one expression for a contradiction is *maodun* 矛盾 ("sword and shield"). This refers to an old story concerning a weapons salesman. When selling a sword, he would claim that it could cut through any shield; and when selling a shield, he would claim that it was invulnerable to any sword.

[12] For more on these matters, see Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008.

Even when all such occurrences of contradictions are set aside, however, there remain many places where the authors utter contradictions intending to endorse them, literally and unambiguously. The contradictory natures of the things concerned are not only endorsed, but they are also defended, explained, and their consequences explored. The world (that is, all that is the case), they argue, has contradictory aspects. It may be that some of these contradictory aspects reveal profound truths about the nature of reality and human existence, truths that would be inaccessible to one limited by the bounds of consistency.

Background on Madhyamaka

This brings us to the present book. Its point is to show that many East Asian philosophers were indeed dialetheists; moreover, that dialetheism was central to their philosophical programs. That is, not only were East Asian philosophers less shy of contradiction than their Western colleagues, but they may have developed important insights that evaded their Western colleagues as a consequence of this willingness to entertain, and sometimes even to embrace, paradox. We will consider a number of texts from East Asian philosophy, examining and explaining the dialetheias their authors endorsed, the reasons for them, and their philosophical consequences.

Interpretation is, of course, always a difficult and contentious matter, and there will be times when the friends of consistency might reasonably disagree with our interpretations. But in some cases, that the view being endorsed is dialetheic is virtually impossible to gainsay. Moreover, bearing in mind the historical and intellectual influences that run between our texts, the central claim of our book, that there is a strong vein of dialetheism running through East Asian philosophy, would seem to be as definitively established as any piece of hermeneutics can be.

Our journey will start with two Chinese classics, *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, but the majority of the texts we will be dealing with are Buddhist. These Buddhist texts draw, of course, on their Indian heritage. So a word of background on the relevant parts of this, and specifically the Madhyamaka Buddhism of Nāgārjuna, is pertinent here. Buddhist exegetes operated with a notion of two truths (*satyas*):[13] a conventional one, *saṃvṛti-satya*, that concerns the way things appear to be, and an ultimate one, *paramārtha-satya*, that pertains to how things actually are. In the pre-Mahāyāna Abhidharma traditions, the ultimate point of view is that everything is composed in the last instance of *dharmas*. These are metaphysical atoms, each of which exists in and of itself; that is, each has intrinsic nature or own-being (*svabhāva*). The objects of conventional understanding are then merely conceptual/mereological constructions made up of these *dharmas*; they are collections of *dharmas*, perceived or cognized as unified wholes through the application of some name or concept.[14]

Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and the Madhyamaka School of Buddhism which was based in large part on this text, rejected this picture. There is nothing that is what it is in and of itself: everything is empty (*śūnya*) of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Nāgārjuna is as insistent as his Abhidharma predecessors that there are two *satyas*, but he understands them differently. Nāgārjuna argues that ultimate reality is emptiness—that everything is empty of intrinsic nature, including emptiness itself. Moreover, he argues that, since to be empty is to be empty of intrinsic nature, to be

[13] Recent commentators sometimes prefer to translate *satya* in this context as *reality*, arguing that it is ambiguous between *truth* and *reality*. Arguably, *truth* is preferable. *Truth* in English is cognate with *trust*, and it means originally *something in which one can trust*. We can trust a true friend or true coin of the realm; the true water in a lake as opposed to the deceptive water in a mirage. Derivatively, a true sentence is a sentence on which we can rely. Semantic truth is thus but one kind of truth, not different from reality. So, when we talk about the two truths—conventional and ultimate—we are talking about the two domains of things on which one can rely, including cabbages and kings, sentences and emptiness.

[14] See Siderits 2007, especially ch. 6.

empty is to be dependently originated, which is the very nature of the conventional truth. There is, hence, both a profound difference between, and an identity of, the two truths.

Nāgārjuna's thought bequeathed Buddhism two tricky problems. First, ultimate reality is the way things are independent of the way they are taken to be when viewed through the lens of the concepts appropriate to conventional reality. It is therefore ineffable, since to describe anything, you have to apply concepts to it. But Nāgārjuna and those who followed him certainly talk about it. Secondly, and even more disconcertingly, since everything is empty, so is ultimate reality. There is, then, no ultimate difference between conventional and ultimate reality; the final nature of each is emptiness, which, again, is identified with dependent origination. Nāgārjuna himself points this out when he claims that there is not an iota of difference between the two. So they are different and the same. Indeed, if the ultimate truth is the way that things are ultimately, Madhyamaka, in virtue of arguing that there is no way that things are ultimately, suggests that there is no ultimate truth—and that this is it. The Madhyamaka view is therefore pregnant with at least two potential contradictions.[15]

A number of later Indian and Tibetan Buddhists struggled to defuse the air of contradiction. We leave aside, here, both the question of the exegetical correctness and that of the philosophical cogency of these readings. The East Asian reaction, however, was quite different. Rather than trying to avoid the contradictions, or downplay them, many East Asian Buddhist philosophers accepted them. They not only accepted them; they foregrounded them in their Buddhist thinking. We may see, here, the influence of Daoist thought. Daoist ideas played an enormous role in the formation of various strands of Chinese Buddhism, and the Indian paradoxes resonated with those already present in Daoism.[16]

[15] For a translation of, and commentary on, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, see Garfield 1995.

[16] On the entry of Buddhism into China, see Sharf 2002.

Where Are We Going?

So here is where we are going. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, we will look at some aspects of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The first will deliver us the paradox of the ineffability of the Dao, while the second will deliver paradoxes concerning meaning and reasoning. Chapter 3 turns to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. Though this is an Indian text, there is little evidence that it had much of an impact on the development of Indian Buddhism. It had, however, an enormous impact in China, particularly on Chan. In this chapter, we will see how this text handles the paradox of the ineffability of the ultimate. Chapter 4 concerns the paradox of the identity and difference of ultimate and conventional reality, and how this is handled by two schools of Chinese Buddhism, Sanlun and Tiantai. Sanlun, represented for our purposes by Jizang, builds the paradox into a dialectical progression of Hegelean proportion. Tiantai theorizes the identity of the two different truths by postulating a third, the middle, which is exactly the identity of the first two. Neither of these strategies avoids the contradiction involved. Rather, they are ways of articulating it.

In Chapter 5, we turn to Chan and its use of "public cases" (Chinese: *gong'an* 公案, Japanese: *kōan*). One might attempt to resolve the contradiction concerning the two truths by parameterization (disambiguation): the conventional and ultimate are different conventionally, but the same ultimately. But this can't work: if the conventional and ultimate are indeed ultimately the same, the distinction collapses. Chan public cases develop and explore this paradox in the context of various points of doctrinal controversy. In Chapter 6, we turn to Dōgen, the founder of the Japanese Sōtō school of Zen. We examine some of the fascicles of his *Shōbōgenzō* to see how Dōgen uses the identity of the two truths to generate and deploy other contradictions relevant to Buddhism, including contradictions concerning enlightenment, time, and language.

In Chapter 7, we come to our final East Asian thinker, Nishida Kitarō, founder of the influential Japanese Kyoto School of philosophy. Nishida draws on Japanese Zen to deliver an analysis of absolute nothingness, which both is and is not an object, and which is and is not ineffable. He also produces an analysis of the self and the world in which it is embedded. These are both identical to and distinct from each other. Chapter 8 briefly reviews the preceding chapters, spelling out precisely the contradictions we have met along the way.

The Book's Coda

We could have ended there, but we decided not to do so. The central aim of the book is to establish the dialetheic tradition running through East Asian philosophy. By the end of Chapter 8, this has been achieved. Many of the thinkers and traditions we consider were clearly dialetheic.

Whether or not any of the contradictory theories we address is true is an entirely different matter. Whatever we say in the first eight chapters (as distinct from what each of us might think) is neutral on that issue. But there is a point at which neutrality becomes impossible: a contradiction that appears in our discussions, and assumes more and more significance as the chapters accumulate, is the contradiction between the first-person ("subjective") view of the world and the third-person ("objective") view. This is the contradiction we take up in the book's coda, Chapter 9. And here, drawing on discussion from previous chapters, we do argue for, and endorse, this contradiction.

Why did we decide to include this final chapter? History and scholarship are interesting and important pursuits. Nonetheless, the texts we are dealing with are philosophical texts. They are dealing with philosophical issues, issues that are alive and important today. The texts are therefore no *mere* objects of scholarship.

What they have to say is part of ongoing and contemporary philosophical debate. We wanted to foreground this point by taking up one such issue in the final chapter. Any stance one takes on a profound philosophical issue is bound to be contentious. No doubt the stance we take here is. But this stance is no philosophical quirk. As the rest of the book shows, it is informed by the thinking of some of the most important East Asian philosophers.

We thus place our own thinking in that tradition.

2

Knots in the Dao

Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest

Introduction: Dao and Dialetheia

We begin our discussion of East Asian attitudes toward paradox with an examination of the role of contradiction and paradox in two influential Chinese philosophical texts: the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The *Daodejing* is traditionally attributed to a figure called Laozi 老子—the "Old Master"—who is supposed to have lived between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE, but the text we have is an amalgam that draws from several sources (Chan 1963; Graham 1981; Hansen 1992). The author of the eponyomous *Zhuangzi* is traditionally dated to the 4th century BCE, but the thirty-three-chapter text in circulation today, edited by Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), is based on a compilation that dates to the 2nd century BCE. (Sections of the text, notably the first seven chapters, may indeed go back much earlier; see Graham 1981 and Roth 1991.)

Together, these texts offer an account of the nature of reality, the way (*dao* 道)[1] of nature, and how one should comport oneself in order to achieve harmony with it.[2] They do so in a way that

[1] The term *dao* is itself polysemic, like the word *way* in English. It can indicate a path or a road; the right way to behave, hence morality; a way that things are; a way of being; a way of doing something; a way of thinking; a way of speaking (a text or discourse); the "great way" (or the way the entire universe is); or a particular way followed by a particular individual; and so on. See Hansen 1992.

[2] For a general introduction to Daoism, see Liu 2007, chs. 6 and 7. For a discussion of Daoist epistemology, with some interesting attention to paradox, see Allen 2014.

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frequently courts paradox. And, as we shall show, some of these paradoxes are not simply flourishes of literary style or challenging metaphors, but are meaningful indications of the contradictory nature of reality itself. While it might sometimes be possible, and even reasonable, to see these prima facie contradictions as attempts to unsettle the reader, to raise puzzles rather than to solve them, or simply to entertain, we think that the pattern of such commitments, coupled with the fact that in the cases we consider the explicit endorsement of the contradictions we ascribe to them is the most natural and rational way to read them, suggests an explicit commitment to the inconsistent nature of reality and so to the truth of some contradictions. This is *not*, however, to say that we ascribe to these philosophers an explicit concern with logic or with dialetheism as a doctrine. None of these figures were logicians (although Zhuangzi clearly honed his arguments in conversation with "logicists" such as Hui Shi 惠施 and Gongsun Long 公孫龍). Our project is one of rational reconstruction: we show that these figures are committed to certain contradictions; that they are content to be so committed; that they are rational to be so committed; and that these contradictions play clear roles in their philosophical outlook. Hence, we might conclude that *had they reflected on the question of dialetheism*, they would have endorsed this view. We establish this in the context of Daoism by considering crucial passages from each of the two texts, starting with the *Laozi*.

Whereof One Cannot Speak: The *Laozi* on the Dao and Its Ineffability

The *Laozi* is a poetic text, both allusive and elusive. Because of this, it has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. We will be foregrounding one particularly influential interpretation of its central theses, namely that associated with the "Neo-Daoists" in

the early years of the Common Era.[3] More specifically, we will approach the text via the commentary of the important Neo-Daoist commentator Wang Bi 王弼, who, according to tradition, lived from 226 to 249 CE, and whose commentary has guided many modern interpretations of the *Daoedejing*.[4]

Let us begin with the famous opening lines of the text:

> The Dao that can be described in language is not the constant Dao; the name that can be given it is not the constant name.[5]

Wang Bi glosses this as follows:

> The Dao that can be rendered in language and the name [*ming*] that can be given it point to a thing/matter [*shi*] or reproduce a form [*xing*], neither of which is it in its constancy [*chang*]. This is why it can neither be rendered in language nor given a name.[6]

So the Dao is ineffable. We will return to the reasons for this a bit later. The *Laozi* continues:

> Nameless it is the origin of the myriad things; named it is the mother of the myriad things.[7]

Here is Wang Bi's gloss:

> Anything that exists originates in nothingness [*wu*], thus, before it has forms and when it is still nameless, it serves as the origin of the myriad things, and once it has forms and is named, it grows

[3] On the influence of Neo-Daoist readings of the Daoist classics on the development of Chinese Buddhism, see Allen 2014.
[4] Unless otherwise noted, translations in what follows are taken from Lynn 1999.
[5] 道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名 (Lynn 1999: 51).
[6] 可道之道，可名之名，指事造形，非其常也。故不可道，不可名也 (ibid).
[7] 無名天地之始，有名萬物之母 (ibid).

> them, rears them, ensures them their proper shapes, and matures them as their mother. In other words, Dao, by being itself formless and nameless, originates and brings the myriad things to completion. They are originated and completed in this way yet do not know how it happens. This is the mystery [*xuan*] beyond mystery.[8]

The thought behind this reading is clear: behind—and ontologically prior to—the flux of worldly events, lies an originary and generating principle, Dao. It is sometimes described in the *Laozi* as nothingness, or the One; [9] it may be conceived as the fundamental ground of being. This gives rise to all things, which exist only as its manifestations; it itself is beyond description, nameless, ineffable.

The ineffability of the Dao is asserted again at various points in the *Laozi*. Thus, at section 25 we have:

> There is something created from the amorphous[10] that was born before Heaven and Earth. Obscure, oh, and, immaterial, oh, it stands alone, unchanged. It operates everywhere but stays free from danger, thus we may consider it the mother of all under Heaven. We know not its name. So style it Dao.[11]

Here is Wang Bi's gloss on the penultimate sentence:

> Names [*ming*] are used to determine forms [*xing*], but, created from the amorphous, it has no form, so we cannot make any

[8] 凡有皆始於無，故「未形」、「無名」之時則為萬物之始，及其「有形」、「有名」之時，則長之育之，亭之毒之，為其母也。言道以無形無名始成萬物，以始以成而不知其所以玄之又玄也 (ibid).

[9] For example, sections 22 and 39.

[10] Here, and later, we have altered the translation from "amorphous and incomplete."

[11] 有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，獨立不改，周行而不殆，可以為天下母。吾不知其名，字之曰道 (trans. Lynn 1999: 94f).

> such determination. Thus the text says that "we do not know its name."[12]

And in section 32 we have:

> The Dao in its constancy is "nameless." Although the uncarved block is small, none under Heaven can make it his servitor [*chen*], but if any lord or prince could hold on to it, the myriad folk would submit spontaneously.[13]

Wang Bi glosses the first sentence as follows:

> The Dao is formless, not attached to anything, and in consequence cannot be named, so we use "nameless" to refer to it in its constancy. Thus the text says, "The Dao in its constancy is 'nameless.'" The uncarved block [*pu*] as such has nothingness [*wu*] for heart/mind [*xin*], and this too is nameless.[14]

The Dao, like the uncarved block—the wood that has not yet been shaped for human purposes, but is pure raw material—is not a thing among things, which are the kinds of things to which names attach, but that which is the primordial ground of the existence of things. On Wang Bi's and our reading, the text is clear that this ground of reality is ineffable.[15]

[12] 名以定形，混成無形，不可得而定，故曰，不知其名也 (trans. Lynn 1999: 95).

[13] 道常無名，樸雖小，天下莫能臣也。侯王若能守之，萬物將自賓 (trans. Lynn 1999: 108).

[14] 道無形不繫常，不可名，以無名為常。故曰道常無名也。樸之為物，以無為心也，亦無名 (ibid).

[15] In notable ways, the Dao, *Laozi*'s One, is like the One of Neo-Platonism, and especially of Plotinus. For him, the One is the ground and source of all reality; see Gerson 2012. It is also ineffable; see *Ennead* V.3.13.1, V.3.14.1–8, V.5.5.11–13, VI.9.5.31–32. See also O'Meara 1995, ch. 5.

The Explanation of Ineffability

This ineffability is not "accidental." There are reasons why the Dao cannot be designated, and these reasons are explicitly endorsed. Wang Bi gives two related but distinct arguments in his short introduction to the text (*Laozi zhilue* 老子指略). The first argument, to which he alludes in his commentary on sections 25 and 32 earlier, goes as follows:

> The way things come into existence and efficacy [*gong*] comes about is that things arise from the formless [*wuxing*] and that efficacy emanates from the nameless [*wuming*]. The formless and the nameless [the Dao] is the progenitor of the myriad things. It is neither warm nor cool and makes neither the note *gong* nor the note *shang*. . . . If it were warm, it could not be cold; if it were the note *gong*, it could not be the note *shang*. If it had a form, it would necessarily possess the means of being distinguished from other things; if it made a sound, it would necessarily belong among other sounds.[16]

In other words, Dao cannot be a *this* rather than a *that*, since it is behind both, and if it were one, it could not be the other. Hence, it is ineffable, since any description would make it a *this* or a *that*. In the *Timaeus* Plato describes how things in the world are produced when the forms are imposed on a formless stuff, *chora*. And he argues that *chora* can have no nature (and so cannot be described), since it would "obtrude them and receive the other qualities badly."[17] This would appear to be the same argument, and Wang Bi (as well as the author of the *Laozi*, if he is right) would appear to endorse the same conclusion, a conclusion from which he never recoils.

[16] 夫物之所以生，功之所以成，必生乎無形，由乎無名。無形無名者，萬物之宗也。不溫不涼，不宮不商。. . . 宮也，則不能商矣。形必有所分，聲必有所屬 (trans. Lynn 1999: 30).

[17] For references and discussion, see Sorabji 1988: 32ff.

The second argument in the introduction is employed in section 41 of the *Laozi*, which deals with the greatness of the Dao. In particular, one sentence says: "The great image is formless,"[18] which Wang Bi glosses as follows:

> As soon as there is form, distinctions exist, and, with distinctions, if something is not warm it must be cool; if not hot, it must be cold. Thus, an image which has the great form is not the great image.[19]

Wang Bi spells out the argument in more detail as follows:

> . . . the abundance that can be spoken of would never have the capacity to govern Heaven and Earth, and to whatever degree a thing has form, it will never be sufficient to encompass the myriad things. . . . Any name will fail to match what it is. Any assessment for it would fail to express all that it is. A name necessarily involves how one thing is distinct from other things, and assessment necessarily involves something on which it depends. Making distinctions, any name would fail to be inclusive; if there is dependence, there is something that is incomplete. As it cannot be perfectly inclusive, any name for it would deviate greatly from the truth as there is no completion, it cannot be captured by names.[20]

That is, the Dao is so great that it transcends our finite categories. Our categories draw distinctions and therefore apply to only a part of reality. The Dao transcends any such part and hence is ineffable.

[18] 大象無形 (Lynn 1999: 132).
[19] 有形則有分，有分者不溫則炎，不炎則寒。故象而形者，非大象 (ibid).
[20] 故可道之盛未足以官天地，有形之極未足以府萬物 . . . 名之不能當，稱之不能既。名必有所分，稱必有所由，有分則有不兼，有由則有不盡。不兼則大殊其真，不盡則不可以名 (our translation).

The 15th-century philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa—as did many other theologians—argued that God, being infinite, transcends all human categories. This, too, would appear to be the same argument.[21] Once again, it is endorsed unequivocally.

The Rub

We have now seen that, at least according to Wang Bi's interpretation, the Dao, important as it is—indeed, fundamentally important—is ineffable. Any category can apply to only part of reality, and any attempt to apply it to the whole would turn it into something that it is not.

There is an obvious knot here. The Dao is ineffable. Yet the *Laozi* says a lot about it, as we have seen, including that it is ineffable. Indeed, one cannot explain *why* it is ineffable, as Wang Bi does, without talking about it. And when we say that something is ineffable, we are talking about that thing, and not something else. (To talk about something else would be to change the subject!) Now, to talk about something may not be to *say* that it is effable; but doing so *shows* that it is. So the Dao is ineffable, by claim, and effable, in virtue of the fact that it is claimed to be ineffable. One does not have to be a genius to note this point. It is clear to even a casual thinker, and Wang Bi is much more than that.[22]

Yet Wang Bi does not comment on the matter. There are many possible explanations for this. As we noted, given the obviousness of the paradox—and the frequency with which paradoxes of

[21] For discussion and references, see Priest 2002: 22ff.

[22] The situation here is one in which many Western and Indian philosophers have found themselves when they claim that something cannot be spoken of and, in the process of explaining why, do exactly that. This is Wittgenstein's predicament when he points out that much of what he says in the *Tractatus* cannot be said; and Heidegger's when he asserts in *Sein und Zeit* that Being is not an object, treating it as such in the process. For references and discussion, see Priest 2002, chs. 12 and 15. Nāgārjuna is in the same predicament in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; see Garfield and Priest 2003.

ineffability are developed in the East Asian tradition—one explanation is *not* that he simply didn't notice it. One might argue that Wang Bi and the author of the *Laozi* commit themselves to these paradoxes to "shake the reader up," to induce an *aporia*, or just to be dramatic. Or one might suggest that their language is not meant to be taken as assertoric or literal. Perhaps it is merely "therapeutic" or metaphorical. We don't think that these are plausible explanations. For one thing, the requisite drama, or rhetorical flourish, is absent in these texts (although perhaps not in the *Zhuangzi*, to which we will return later). There is no mention of an irresolvable *aporia*, and none plays a role in the remainder of the *Laozi*, which is devoted to discussions of the nature of reality and how to act in conformity to it, nor of our inability to know it or to know how to behave. And while the text does trade in metaphors, this appears to be the unpacking, rather than the presentation of one.

The most obvious and compelling reading is simply that the author of the *Laozi* and Wang Bi accepted the contradiction. At any rate, neither the text nor the commentary ever tries to escape it or to explain it away. Here then we have our first Daoist paradox: a paradox of expressibility. We have a good argument to the conclusion that we can say nothing about the Dao and that argument explains why the Dao is inexpressible, thereby expressing something about it. Once again, it is important to note that neither the author of this text, whoever she or he might be, nor any canonical commentator on the text attempts to defuse this contradiction.[23] It seems simply to be accepted, which is not surprising. One of the great insights of Laozi and Zhuangzi is that the world itself is deeply paradoxical, and any attempt to understand it that presumes consistency will fail. The frequent explicit assertion of contradictions in these texts provides ample evidence of this comfort with paradox.

[23] Even Hansen (1992), who strives to show that many of the passages in the *Laozi* that might appear paradoxical can be reread consistently, does not suggest that *this* paradox is not genuine, or that the author of the text is not committed to it.

Just Saying: The *Zhuangzi* on Justification

The Passage in Question

Let us now turn from the *Laozi* to the *Zhuangzi*, a text renowned both for its captivating prose style and its enigmatic philosophical exposition.[24] The passage on which we will focus demonstrates both of these properties. It will therefore require some unpacking. This passage articulates twin contradictions. Both are responses to arguments from the logicist school—the so-called *school of names*. Zhuangzi will point out that although the logicists argue that one cannot know that one means anything, one can know exactly that. Moreover, he continues, although the logicists propound arguments, in fact one cannot argue convincingly for anything; nonetheless, he then argues, one can argue for exactly that. And once again, nothing in this text backs down from these contradictions.

Let us start with the passage itself.

> Making a point to show that a point is not a point is not as good as making a non-point to show that a point is not a point. Using a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse. Heaven and Earth are one point; the ten thousand things are one horse.[25]

Before we unpack this passage through an exploration of the metonymies it exploits and the philosophical and rhetorical context in which it figures, a brief comment is in order about the translation. The term *zhi* 指, which our translator, Paul Kjellberg (2001), has rendered as "point," literally means *finger*, and thus by

[24] Thanks to Scott Cook for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this part.

[25] 以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也。以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。天地一指也，萬物一馬也 (trans. Kjellberg 2001: 213).

extension *referent* or *intention* (that to which one is pointing). Note that the same cluster of meanings is present in English. We can talk about the *point* of an utterance, the *point* of an action, and a finger can *point* just as an utterance or an action can have a *point*. The idea of reference is in the Chinese as well as in the English. Now let's try to figure out what the text is saying.

The Metonyms: Horses and Fingers

Both the reference to the horse and the reference to the finger are allusions to arguments advanced by the Chinese philosopher (or proponent of the so-called school of names), Gongsun Long.[26] While the first argument is not important in content for Zhuangzi's project, it is important to know what it is in order to read the passage. The second, however, is more directly relevant. Let us begin with the horse. The following text is attributed to Gongsun Long:

> Can it be that a white horse is not a horse?
>
> ADVOCATE: It can.
> OBJECTOR: How?
> ADVOCATE: "Horse" is that by means of which one names the shape. "White" is that by means of which one names the color. What names the color is not what names the shape. Hence, I say that a white horse is not a horse.

[26] According to tradition, Gongsun Long and Zhuangzi were contemporaries, and in this passage, Zhuangzi is responding directly to Gongsun Long's sophistical arguments. But as we know almost nothing about the lives of either figure, and as our extant historical sources postdate their deaths by well over a century, they are better regarded as fictional characters rather than historical personages. Be that as it may, it is clear that by the time of the composition of the "Inner Chapters" of the *Zhuangzi*, two paradoxes—"a white horse is not a horse" and "pointing doesn't reach the object"—were in circulation and were associated with Gongsun Long. For a discussion of the relationship between Gongsun Long and Zhuangzi, see Hansen 1992: 270–272, Vierhelleer 2014, and Ivanhoe and Van Norden 2001: 218n3.

OBJECTOR: If there are white horses, one cannot say that there are no horses. If one cannot say that there are no horses, doesn't that mean that there are horses? For there to be white horses is for there to be horses. How could it be that the white ones are not horses?

ADVOCATE: If one wants a horse, that extends to a yellow or black horse. But if one wants a white horse, that does not extend to a yellow or black horse. Suppose that a white horse were a horse. Then what one wants [in the two cases] would be the same. If what one wants were the same, then a white [horse] would not differ from a horse. If what one wants does not differ, then how is it that a yellow or black horse is acceptable in one case and unacceptable in the other case? It is clear that acceptable and unacceptable are mutually contrary. Hence, yellow and black horses are the same [in that, if there are yellow or black horses], one can respond that there are horses, but one cannot respond that there are white horses. Thus, it is evident that a white horse is not a horse.[27]

There are two arguments here, and on the most obvious reading, they are both rather sophistical. The first argument simply goes from the premise that the referent of the phrase *white horse* is different from that of the phrase *horse* (the first refers to the set of white horses, and the second to the set of all horses) to the conclusion that white horses are not horses. The argument is obviously terrible. It may be a sound argument to the claim that *horse* and *white horse* are not synonymous, but that hardly gets the conclusion

[27] "白馬非馬"，可乎？曰：可。曰：何哉？曰：馬者，所以命形也；白者，所以命色也。命色者非名形也。故曰："白馬非馬"。曰：有馬不可謂無馬也。不可謂無馬者，非馬也？有白馬為有馬，白之，非馬何也？曰：求馬，黃、黑馬皆可致；求白馬，黃、黑馬不可致。是白馬乃馬也，是所求一也。所求一者，白者不異馬也，所求不異，如黃、黑馬有可有不可，何也？可与不可，其相非明。如黃、黑馬一也，而可以應有馬，而不可以應有白馬，是白馬之非馬，審矣！（*Gongsun longzi* 公孫龍子, trans. Ivanhoe and Van Norden 2001: 364–365).

that a white horse is not a horse, relying on an equivocation between identity and predication. The second is not much better and relies on a crude intentional fallacy. If I want a white horse, but you give me a black horse, then I did not get what I want. But if what I wanted was a horse, I would have got what I wanted. So I didn't want a horse. But I did want a white horse. So a white horse must not be a horse.

Graham (1986) proposes a plausible and more charitable reconstruction of this argument. Taking Hansen's (1983) somewhat problematic reading as a starting point, he reads Gongsung Long as making a point about parts and wholes in the domain of concepts. On Graham's reading, Gonsung Long is arguing that when we add *whiteness* to *horseness*, we get a new entity with two parts, *white-horseness*, which is different from *horseness.* Or, to put it more clearly in English, Gongsung Long is arguing that *to be a white horse* is not *to be a horse.* We think that Graham probably has this right, but for our purposes, nothing hangs on the analysis: it is Zhuangzi's reply, not Gongsung Long's argument, that is the main point here.

On some of these readings, these arguments are terrible; on Graham's it may be more successful but not terribly interesting, but their success, failure, and philosophical interest are all beside the point. The important point for reading the *Zhuangzi* passage is that when he uses the term *horse*, he may be seen as talking not about horses but about *arguments.* Moreover, despite the fact that these are bad arguments for a silly conclusion, he is not talking about *bad* arguments per se. Zhuangzi is talking about *arguments simpliciter*. So, if he were not being so elliptical, he could have said, "better to use a non-argument to show that an argument is not an argument than to use an argument to show that an argument is not an argument . . . the myriad things/heaven and earth/everything is one argument." Still cryptic, but we are getting someplace, as we will see shortly.

Turning to the second argument, Gongsun Long is quoted as saying, "all things are capable of being pointed out [lit. fingered], but

pointing out can never be pointed out."[28] This should put one familiar with Indian grammatical philosophy in mind of Bartṛhari's paradox (Herzberger and Herzberger 1981). Bartṛhari (c. 5th century CE) argued that if meaning (or reference) is a relation between words and their meanings/referents, then the very word *meaning/reference* is itself *meaningless/non-referential* since the word *meaning/reference* would have to be related to its meaning, which could not be specified, since part of that meaning would be the relation of that very word to its own meaning, generating a vicious regress. Gongsun Long seems to have the same thing in mind: if to be meaningful is to designate something, then since we cannot designate designation, on pain of regress, *designation* is not meaningful, in which case there is no designation, and hence no meaning. But we have *said* that using a *statement* that must, therefore, be meaningful.

This argument is more interesting than the horse argument, and indeed it is more germane to Zhuangzi's own point. When Zhuangzi uses the word *finger/point/meaning*, he may be seen as having this very argument in mind; but he will be arguing that things are even worse than Gongsun Long thinks they are; that is, he will concede Gongsun Long's point, and then show that it leads straight to contradiction. Before we return to the argument itself, let us continue to explore the background, using as context other arguments in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi.*

The Skeptical Background 1: Meaning

In a dialogue near the opening of the second chapter, Zhuangzi writes:

> . . . Do you understand? You hear the piping of men but not yet the piping of the earth. You hear the piping of the earth but not yet the piping of Heaven. . . .

[28] 物莫非指，而指非指 (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 12n13).

> When the Great Clump belches forth its vital breath (*qi*) we call it the wind. As soon as it arises, glaring cries emerge from all the ten thousand hollows. Don't tell me you've never heard how long the rustling continues, on and on! The towering trees of the forest, a hundred spans around, are filled with indentations and holes—like noses, mouths, ears; like sockets, enclosures, mortars like puddles. Roarers and whizzers, scolders and sighers, shouters, wailers, boomers, growlers! One leads with a yeeee! Another answers with a yuuu! A light breeze brings a small harmony, while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand. And once the sharp wind has passed, all these holes return to their silent emptiness. Have you never seen all the tempered attunements, all the cunning contentions?
>
> So the piping of the earth means just the sound of these hollows. And the piping of man would be the sound of bamboo panpipes. What, then, is the piping of Heaven?
>
> It blows forth in ten thousand different ways, allowing each to go as it will. Each takes what it chooses for itself—but then who could it be that activates them all? [29]

We pipe. Nature pipes. The universe pipes. We take our own piping to be very special, to be *meaningful*, unlike the piping of earth and the piping of heaven. But Zhuangzi asks us to reconsider—to take seriously the possibility that our piping is just one more species of the same genus: nothing more than sounds produced by various causes. He asks us to consider the possibility that all we say is "full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing," and that the significance

[29] . . . 汝知之乎？女聞人籟而未聞地籟，女聞地籟而未聞天籟夫！」 . . .「夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。是唯无作，作則萬竅怒呺。而獨不聞之翏翏乎？山林之畏佳，大木百圍之竅穴，似鼻，似口，似耳，似枅，似圈，似臼，似洼者，似污者；激者，謞者，叱者，吸者，叫者，謞者，宎者，咬者，前者唱于而隨者唱喁。泠風則小和，飄風則大和，厲風濟則眾竅為虛。而獨不見之調調、之刁刁乎？」子游曰：「地籟則眾竅是已，人籟則比竹是已。敢問天籟。」子綦曰：「夫吹萬不同，而使其自已[1]也，咸其自取，怒者其誰邪！」 (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 9–10).

of our own speech is a species of the same genus as the significance of thunder, the wind, or birdsong. Cook (2003) quotes Guo Xiang's commentary in this passage: "[A]lthough the sounds have a myriad of differences, the standard with which they are endowed is uniform, and thus superior and inferior have no place among them. This is compared to the wind upon things: the different tones are all alike in their correctness" (72). Cook argues that Guo shows correctly that Zhuangzi denies any standard of correctness or superiority for one kind of sound over another. This is the possibility raised by Gongsun Long's second argument, whether or not it is ultimately successful, and it is this possibility that is mooted by the piping passage.[30]

Why take this seriously? For at least two reasons: first, once it is on the table, how could you argue against it? What could you say? You might offer an abstract semantic theory for one's language, perhaps a Montague grammar. Zhuangzi will compliment you on the quality of the sound but will not concede that what you said meant anything. Any direct argument for your theory will only beg the question, for once the possibility that language is meaningless is on the table—once it is a live option, Zhuangzi points out—it is hard to refute: nothing you say will even count as an argument, let alone a sound argument.

Or one might try instead to offer a *reductio* on Zhuangzi's argument. One might argue, for instance, that even to assert the argument, Zhuangzi must mean something by his words. If he doesn't, we might say, we have no reason to be convinced; if he does, he has undermined his own position. But even this strategy fails. Zhuangzi once again replies that he is making sounds, piping of his own. That's all. If the effect of his piping is to make us see that we are all only piping, so be it. But if it has that effect, it does so in the

[30] See also Schwitzgebel 1996 and Berkson 1996 for similar reflections on Zhuangzi's skepticism regarding the privileged place of human language as significant.

way that the sound of the waves lulls us to sleep, or in the way that a sudden bang startles us, simply by causing us to transform from one state to another, not in virtue of some special semantic property. If, on the other hand, that is not its effect, and we continue to believe that our speech is more than piping, we are welcome to keep piping away. But if we do so, there is no way that we should have any *confidence* that our piping is more than that, for there is nothing we could say that we could know to be meaningful in this dialectical context.[31]

This takes us to the second reason: there is something (paradoxically) deeply *right* about what Zhuangzi is saying: once we enter this dialectical context, we *can't* know that our speech is meaningful, if meaning is to be taken to be something more than a brute causal notion. Keep that dialectical context in mind, and keep in mind how easy it is to enter it: Zhuangzi is responding to Gongsun Long's argument, which has as its conclusion the claim that there is no meaning relation, and hence that words don't mean anything at all—that it is impossible to make a point. Zhuangzi takes this argument seriously. He does not necessarily accept its soundness, but he does think that it raises an important question, and that is all he needs to get to the paradox he is about to develop.[32] Zhuangzi points out that just raising the question about the meaningfulness of language creates what William James called a new "live option"—that language is meaningless. It is in the context in which this is a live option for the disputants that the argument to which we are about to turn is mounted, an argument that only requires that—whether or not

[31] The response is similar to one made to his critics by Sextus; see Priest 2002: 3.4. Schwitzgebel and Berkson (op. cit.) offer similar interpretations.

[32] Here we leave aside the question of whether this argument is in fact sound. The important point is simply that Zhuangzi takes it to be sound—at least for the sake of argument—and so accepts its conclusion—that we never mean anything—again, for the sake of argument.

Gongsun Long's argument is ultimately successful—it creates such a context.[33]

Once the option that our language is meaningless is *alive*, whether or not it turns out to be true, we are in trouble. Zhuangzi sees that it sets up an epistemological paradox: we can never know that what we say or think is meaningful at all, and we can know that. First, the argument that we cannot: to know that what we say or think is meaningful is to believe it with justification.[34] But to accept any justification would be to know that the justification is meaningful, which, *ex hypothesi*, we do not (given the openness of the question). To assert baldly, without justification, that we know that our thoughts and language are meaningful would be to beg the question; our own expression that we know that—whether in thought or language—would already have to be known to be meaningful. So we cannot know (discursively) that what we think is meaningful.

But hold on—and here is the second argument—we have just come to know that we cannot know that our language is meaningful, and we can only have done so if this expression—*we cannot know that our language is meaningful*—and those other expressions composed by the argument are themselves meaningful. Hence we have an argument that we *do* know (again, discursively; after all, we are saying it) that our language and thought is meaningful. So if each of these arguments is sound—and Zhuangzi clearly thinks that each is—we both can know and cannot know that our language and thought is meaningful. Once again, Zhuangzi does nothing to

[33] We understand Zhuangzi's strategy in much of the second chapter as developing a series of "live option" problems in epistemology. In doing so, he challenges a model of knowledge as involving a knower standing against a world to be known. This model, he argues, always falls prey to problems of this kind.

[34] The model of knowledge as justified true belief is, to be sure, not the one that Zhuangzi favors. He prefers to encourage a non-discursive understanding of human wisdom, and much of his epistemological reflection is dedicated to demonstrating the superiority of such wisdom over discursive knowledge. But that is not to say that discursive knowledge is impossible, only that it is of less importance than one might have thought. And to know discursively is to believe something truly, and with justification.

soften or to back away from this explicit contradiction. On the contrary, he embraces it.[35]

That concludes the main argument. But it was Gongsun Long who set this option on the table, and this argument also gives Zhuangzi a nice, additionally paradoxical reply to him: if Gongsun Long is right that there is no meaning (the conclusion he takes himself to have established—again, bracketing, with Zhuangzi, the question of the soundness of that argument), then his own argument, which is making that point, should be completely unpersuasive in virtue of being meaningless. For Gongsun Long to show that it is impossible to make a point, he would be better off doing something meaningless. (Of course, perhaps, if he is right, he has just done so.) That is, he should use a non-point to show that a point is not a point. One can imagine Gongsun Long saying, "so far, so good. That is what I have been claiming to do."

The problem, as Zhuangzi points out, is that the moment he has done this, whatever *non-point* he has used becomes an *argument* for the claim that a point is not a point—that there is no meaning. That is, to the extent that that non-point is effective in demonstrating that one cannot make a point, it has made a point—and therefore it is known to be meaningful. The consequence of all of this, according to Zhuangzi, is that we can never escape the discursive realm: however much we might be *just* piping, we have no choice but to take ourselves to be doing *more* than that. That it is part of what it is to be human, even if we cannot find an Archimedean justification for it. Heaven and earth are one point.[36]

[35] Coutinho (2004: 122–131) agrees with us that Zhuangzi endorses paradoxes, but argues that these all arise from vagueness, and that the principal concern for Zhuangzi is that our language is vague. But the present case shows that this cannot be the only source of paradox for Zhuangzi, and that he is concerned with paradox more broadly. While Coutinho is right that Zhuangzi does raise sorites paradoxes, the paradox of the possible meaninglessness of language has nothing whatsoever to do with vagueness, and it is clearly important to Zhuangzi.

[36] This hints at deeper paradoxes in Zhuangzi's program. Zhuangzi, as we note earlier, is often properly read as a critic of a dualistic, discursive model of human knowledge, preferring a model of understanding as the effortless engagement in which, to use Allen's (2014) apt phrase, one "vanishes into things." We agree. But, as we will see more clearly

(And once again, contra Coutinho, this has nothing to do with vagueness. Zhuangzi is pointing directly to the paradoxical nature of our knowledge and discursive practices no matter how precisely we speak.)

The Skeptical Background 2: Justification

Shortly before the passage in question, Zhuangzi embarks on another discussion, one that should remind us of the tropes of Anesidemus, invoking what Sextus Empiricus was to call "the problem of the criterion":[37]

> Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that really mean I'm right and you're wrong? Must one of us be right and the other wrong? If neither you nor I can know, a third person would be even more benighted. Whom should we have straighten out the matter? Someone who agrees with you? But since he already agrees with you, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with me? But since she already agrees with me, how can she straighten it out? Someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he straighten it

later, in the context of the parable of the butcher, this cannot be seen as an abandonment of the discursive in favor of the non-discursive, or of the dual in favor of the non-dual, as that would be to affirm yet another—higher-order—duality, and to deny that we can engage spontaneously and non-discursively with discursive practices. Instead, it must at the same time be an embrace of the very discursivity and duality that is rejected, but as non-dually constituted under the non-discursive and non-dual wisdom that is the goal of the Daoist sage (who has no goals).

[37] Allen (2014) also notices this parallel, as do Schwitzgebel (1996) and Kjellberg (1996). Loy (1996) notes the skeptical strategy, but not the connection to the problem of the criterion.

> out? So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is—shall we all wait for some other?[38]

So here is the problem of the criterion, which Sextus thought captured the heart of Pyrrhonian skepticism. We don't have knowledge unless we have justification. But justification is good only if we know that it itself is justified (on pain of regress), and it can settle disputes only if both parties agree that it is justificatory. But how are we to vindicate a criterion of justification? We cannot use that criterion itself on pain of circularity, and we cannot use another on pain of vicious regress. If we are in dispute, then neither of us can judge, as we are each party to the matter; for either of us to judge would be to beg the question and to take the circularity horn. Moreover, if we are really in dispute, and we care about the outcome, we can never agree on an appropriate third party. We would have to know that they are a reliable judge, and to agree to that, we would have to agree about the facts about which they pass judgment. If we do, there is no dispute, but if we disagree about that, we are off on the regress—the other horn of Sextus's dilemma. So reason cannot ground knowledge and cannot settle disputes.

This argument might seem like a philosopher's plaything, but as Hume (in the discussion of skepticism with regard to reason in Book I of the *Treatise*) and Wittgenstein (in *On Certainty*) were to emphasize much later, and as Zhuangzi does here, it is deadly serious and cuts to the heart of what it is to be a rational thinker or a knower.[39] Reason demands rational warrant, but that warrant can lie neither within nor outside of reason and rational processes. (If it

[38] 既使我與若辯矣若勝我。我不若勝，若果是也？我果非也邪？我勝若，若不吾勝，我果是也？而果非也邪？其或是也，其或非也邪？其俱是也，其俱非也邪？我與若不能相知也，則人固受其黮闇。吾誰使正之？使同乎若者正之，既與若同矣，惡能正之？使同乎我者正之，既同乎我矣，惡能正之？使異乎我與若者正之，既異乎我與若矣，惡能正之？使同乎我與若者正之，既同乎我與若矣，惡能正之？然則我與若與人俱不能相知也，而待彼也邪？ (trans. Zyporyn 2009: 19–20).

[39] See Garfield 2019 for more on the Humean side.

lies within, it is unjustified, and if it lies without, it is irrational.) So the Pyrrhonian or Daoist skeptic argues that claims to rational certainty are no more than pipe dreams.

Dreams of Butterflies

Speaking of dreams, one of the most famous passages in all of Daoist philosophical literature occurs at the end of Chapter 2:

> Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, fluttering about joyfully just as a butterfly would. He followed his whims exactly as he liked and knew nothing about Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he awoke, and there he was, the startled Zhuang Zhou in the flesh. He did not know if Zhou had been dreaming he was a butterfly, or if a butterfly was now dreaming it was Zhou. Surely, Zhou and a butterfly count as two distinct identities! Such is what we call the transformation of one thing into another.[40]

This is *not* an early version of Descartes's dream argument. Zhuangzi takes it for granted that there is a difference between himself and the butterfly, and, as the final sentence makes clear, he takes it for granted that there is a transformation from the dream state to the waking state. Yet Zhuangzi does not know—at least at the moment he awakens—whether he is a butterfly or a philosopher; whether he has just entered or just exited a dream. Why not?

Well, at that liminal moment, a question has been posed. There are, at that moment, two live options, and once again, it is the liveliness of the options that makes the philosophical difference. As far as Zhuang can tell, he might be a butterfly; but he might also be a

[40] 昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也，自喻適志與！不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，-胡蝶之夢為周與？周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化 (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 21).

philosopher. It is like that when you are just waking up. But if each option is live, there is nothing that could decide between them. Suppose you were in Zhuangzi's pajamas. Everything in experience is consistent with the possibility that you are a butterfly dreaming yourself to be a philosopher. Everything is also consistent with the possibility that you are a philosopher who once dreamed yourself to be a butterfly. There is no way to exit your experience to find an Archimedean perspective from which to decide the question, any more than you can exit reason to justify reason, or exit discursive practices to ground their meaningfulness.

Ziporyn (personal communication) notes that Chu Boxiu (c. 12th century) comments as follows on the butterfly passage:

> Zhuangzi and the butterfly are each unaware of each other, don't comprehend each other, but in that both in the end return to transformation, they have never been different. Thus we know that the ten thousand forms of plant and animal life, the ten thousand changes of life and death, whether sentient or insentient, in the end all are equalized in transformation. Transformation is the beginning and end of the formation of all teachings, the emergence and submergence of the ten thousand types of beings.[41]

This is pretty dark stuff, but we can shed some light on it. Chu Boxiu notes that the crucial term in this argument is *transformation*. It is in transformation that the distinction between things vanishes, and where paradox arises. The butterfly option is not live for you *now*. Wide awake, far from the liminal state of the transformation from sleep to waking, you cannot take seriously the possibility that you are a butterfly. ("They are unaware of each other.") Nor are any of the countless variations on that option alive for you: you can't believe that you are a moth, a bird, a frog,

[41] 莊蝶夢覺各不相知，終歸於化則未嘗有異。是知動植萬形，生死萬變，有情無情，卒齊於化。化者形教之始終，萬類之出入 (trans. Zyporyn 2009: 22).

and so on. . . . This is not because you have ruled each out, but because none of them arises. You are a philosopher who has had such dreams, and that is clear to you simply because you enact the life of a human philosopher, or live in the *way* (*Dao*) that human philosophers live. Butterflies who once dreamed of being human philosophers—if there are any such things—also live the lives of butterflies, and we can presume that for them, as they flit from flower to flower, a life as a human philosopher is no live option; nor are any of the other equally improbable alternatives. The butterfly enacts the life of a butterfly.

At the moment when he awakes, however ("equalized in transformation"), Zhuangzi was neither immersed in his human life nor in the dreamed butterfly life, and nothing short of immersion can tell us in what life we are immersed. That immersion, though is not a cognitive state: it is a way of being. It is *being human*, or *being a butterfly*. To transform from one way of life to another is not to gain a bit of knowledge, or to change your mind about what species you happen to be; it is to transform one's entire mode of being. Transformation is *enactive*, not *cognitive*; it is also *possible*, although it can never be *total*. Recall that the *Daodejing* argues that the great Dao is the inexpressible primordial ground of expression and speech. Here, in a parallel, Zhuangzi argues that our immersion in a way of life is the inexpressible ground of our ability to call that life into question and to interrogate it, and sometimes we do so. But just as we cannot express the great Dao, we cannot interrogate the very grounds of the possibility of interrogating our lives. Nor do we need to, any more than the butterfly needs to interrogate its life in order to live it.[42]

[42] Here our reading of this passage diverges from that of Allen (op. cit.). He argues that Zhuangzi is gesturing to the idea that just as Zhuangzi cannot say whether he is a philosopher or a butterfly, whether he is in or out of a dream, we cannot say whether our lives are lived inside or outside of a greater dream. This interpretation is reasonable, but we think that our reading, on which it forms part of the larger pattern of "open question" arguments, and part of the larger pattern of rejections of cognitive Archimedean fulcra, makes better sense of the chapter as a whole.

So What's the Point (or the Horse)?

With a bit more sense of what Zhuangzi is up to, we can return to the passage with which we began, and we can see how the paradoxes developed earlier are mobilized as responses to Gongsun Long. To remind the reader, this is as follows:

> Making a point to show that a point is not a point is not as good as making a non-point to show that a point is not a point. Using a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse. Heaven and Earth are one point; the ten thousand things are one horse.[43]

Let us start with the point and the non-point. Gongsun Long, as we saw, argues that we can never fully succeed in making a point. He argues for this on the grounds that we can't even say what it would be to make a point, and we can't do that because it would require us to designate designation, to get outside of discourse to talk about discourse. Nonetheless, Gongsun Long, as a proponent of the "logicist" school, establishes the point by arguing for it, and so asserts it. He says that we can't say anything about saying stuff, and in doing so succeeds in saying stuff about saying stuff, thus undermining his own conclusion.

This is, as we saw earlier, where Zhuangzi steps in, not only pointing out the paradoxical nature of the situation (to which Gongsun Long may not have been oblivious), but once again doing it one better. He argues that if Gongsun Long is right, the only way to show that what looks like a point is not in fact a point cannot be to make a point—as Gongsun Long did. One has to find something that is not a point. That is, if meaningful assertion is really impossible (if we are all just piping), then the only way to say that is to

[43] 以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也；以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。天地，一指也；萬物，一馬也 (trans. Kjellberg 1993: 24).

say something meaningless—to make a non-point. But then, that meaningless sound, if it succeeded in conveying the information that a point is not a point—that we can't really say anything—would make that point. Heaven and Earth are one point: you can't get out of discourse.

So, if Zhuangzi is right, there is a very deep paradox here. If you want to show that we can't say anything determinate, you can't do it by saying that. You'd have to show it by something other than saying. But if you succeeded, you'd just be saying, and so couldn't show it that way, either. After all, if what is at issue is the possibility of saying anything, saying that we can say stuff presupposes the thesis to be shown. To somehow say that you can't say stuff, however, is either to falsify your own claim by saying that *or* to say nothing at all, even that. So you can neither say nor not say that you can or can't say stuff. But we just did. And so we didn't. (The affinities of this paradox to the paradox of expressibility in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* that we discuss in the next chapter are striking.) It seems plain that this is a paradox to which Zhuangzi is explicitly committed, one he works to develop, and one that is central to his philosophical outlook. Zhuangzi, as many have noted (e.g. Cook, Graham, Hansen, Kjellberg, Schwitzgebel), is not only deeply skeptical about the expressive success of language, but thinks that to say as much is to involve oneself immediately in a paradox. This discussion shows us just why he thinks that the paradox is inevitable, and what it tells us about the nature of discursive practices.

Let us now return to the Horse paradox, which has a similar structure. As we noted, "a horse" does not refer directly to the white horse argument per se; rather, it is a metonym for argument in general. And Zhuangzi's argument here, parallel to the one just sketched, follows the problem of the criterion closely, but it does the Pyrrhonists one better. This time the target is Zhuangzi himself. He has just argued (in the "Suppose you and I get into a debate" passage) that arguments can't settle anything. But now there is a reflexive moment in the dialectic. Because he has just *argued*

that arguments can't establish anything, *that* argument can't establish that arguments can't establish anything. No argument can. No horse can establish that a horse is not a horse. So better to use a non-horse—a non-argument to establish this conclusion.

But suppose one did so. Then whatever that non-argument appears to be, if it manages to establish the conclusion, it functions as an argument. Every damned thing is one more horse. Just as you can't step out of the domain of discourse to make claims about discourse, as we saw in the case of the non-point, you can't step out of the domain of arguments either to establish that arguments are probative (as the Pyrrhonists were to argue), or even to argue that they are not. We are stuck in a discursive and dialectical domain that we can neither vindicate nor criticize. Even this conclusion can't be shown to be more than mindless piping; even this argument can't be shown to establish that. But it does.

The skeptical conclusion coupled with the paradoxical nature of its content and mode of demonstration are about as vertiginous as one could imagine. Not only can't we say anything or refrain from doing so, but we can't even argue that we can neither say nor not say anything; nor can we refrain from arguing. We speak what cannot be spoken; we argue for what cannot be established by argument.

The Uncarved Block

Let us conclude with one last metaphor:

> Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "I have a huge tree which people call the Stink Tree. The trunk is swollen and gnarled, impossible to align with any level or ruler. The branches are twisted and bent, impossible to align to any T-square or carpenter's arc. Even if it were growing right in the road, a carpenter would not give it so much as a second glance. And your words are similarly big but useless, which is why they are rejected by everyone who hears them."

> Zhuangzi said, ". . . You . . . have this big tree, and you worry that it is useless. Why not plant it in our homeland . . . ? Then you could loaf and wander there, doing lots of nothing there at its side, and take yourself a nap, far-flung and unfettered, there beneath it. It will never be cut down by ax or saw. Nothing will harm it. Since it has nothing for which it can be used, what could entrap or afflict it?" [44]

Once again, this is a metaphor with two meanings. It is often read simply as advice to remain, like the Stink Tree, an uncarved block. If you live according to nature, without too much refinement or order, not making too much sense, nobody will bother you, require you to do any heavy lifting, or any administration. You can relax, or act spontaneously as Zhuangzi's Butcher Ding does when carving oxen. That reading is fine as far as it goes, but once again, given this dialectical context, we can see more deeply into this parable.

There is an analogy here between the tree and a Daoist way of life. A life of twists and turns, unregulated by social rectitude is more likely to be long and undisturbed than one constrained by social measuring rods; being useful is not always a good idea. But, however apt that analogy may be, there is another one here: that between the tree and Zhuangzi's arguments, prominently including the arguments we have been considering here. If Zhuangzi is right, and if the reading we have been considering is correct, Zhuangzi's arguments cannot be measured by any carpenter's (or philosopher's) rule or T-square. There is no independent reason for believing them. So they should be rejected by everyone who hears them. And, of course, on that basis; that is, on the basis of those very arguments.

[44] 惠子謂莊子曰：「吾有大樹，人謂之樗。其大本擁腫而不中繩墨，其小枝卷曲而不中規矩，立之塗，匠者不顧。今子之言，大而無用，眾所同去也。」莊子曰：「今子有大樹，患其無用，何不樹之於無何有之鄉，廣莫之野，彷徨乎無為其側，逍遙乎寢臥其下？不夭斤斧，物無害者，無所可用，安所困苦哉！ (trans. Ziporyn 2009: 8).

And in Conclusion . . .

Both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* are committed to dialethias. Each clearly delivers contradictions; each does so self-consciously; neither backs off from nor mitigates their contradictory force; and in each case the contradictions reflect their philosophical commitments. That in the *Laozi* concerns the Dao as an underlying principle of reality. It is both ineffable and effable. That in the *Zhuangzi* concerns the Dao as human embeddedness in nature. People state, people argue; people know what they mean; and part of what they state, argue, and know is that meaning, argument, and knowledge—if knowledge is understood as what we can justify by means of arguments—are impossible.

It is perhaps not surprising that if the Dao, the ground of reality, is contradictory, what it generates is as well. We—and our mode of being—are part of what it produces. Perhaps not a significant part, cosmically, but certainly significant for us. Our Dasein, in turn, reflects the contradictory reality in which we are embedded. The knots in the Dao and Dasein intertwine.

3

Silence and *Upāya*

Paradox in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*

Jay L. Garfield

Introduction

The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* is not an East Asian text; it is an Indian Mahāyāna sūtra. Nonetheless, owing in part to its narrative cohesion (rare for a Mahāyāna text) and its literary qualities, it became popular in China and Japan. Images of Vimalakīrti are common in East Asian temples, and references, either explicit or implicit to this sūtra, are ubiquitous in Chan and Zen literature. Because of its influence in East Asia, and its engagement with themes that run through the chapters that follow, we use it here as a segue into our discussion of East Asian Buddhism.[1]

The sūtra is devoted to an exploration of several related themes. The principal theme is *upāya*, or the bodhisattva's skill in facilitating the awakening of all sentient beings. Thurman (1976) creatively translates this term as *skill in liberative technique*, a translation that gets to the importance of the idea of *upāya* in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, both in India and in East Asia. One of the most important attributes a bodhisattva cultivates is the skill necessary to bring sentient beings of all kinds and dispositions to awakening.

[1] Our quotations from the Vimalakīrti are taken from the celebrated translation by Kumārajīva completed in 406 (*Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經, T.475).

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Vimalakīrti, the central figure in the sūtra, is a layperson renowned for his *upāya*. The sūtra introduces Vimalakīrti as follows:

> Wanting to save people, [Vimalakīrti] used his excellent skillful means to reside in Vaiśālī, where with wealth immeasurable he attracted the poor, with the purity of his morality he attracted the miscreants, with the moderation of his forbearance he attracted the angry, with great exertion he attracted the indolent, with single-minded concentration he attracted the perturbed, and with definitive wisdom he attracted the foolish.
>
> Although he was a white-robed [layman], he maintained the pure Vinaya conduct of a *śramaṇa*; although he resided in the home, he was not attached to the triple world. He appeared with a wife and sons, but always cultivated chastity. He seemed to have subordinates, but always enjoyed transcendence. Although his clothing was richly decorated, it was with the marks and features [of a Tathāgata] that he adorned his body. Although he drank and ate, his favorite taste was the joy of concentration. If he went to gambling houses or theaters it was only to save people. He hosted those of the heretical paths without breaking his correct faith. Although he elucidated the secular classics he always took pleasure in the Buddha-Dharma. He was revered by all as the one most worthy of offerings.
>
> In supporting the correct Dharma he attracted both old and young. In all of his business dealings, although he made worldly profits he never took joy in them. In wandering the crossroads, he dispensed benefit to sentient beings. In entering into government administration, he safeguarded everyone. In entering into the lecture halls, he led people by means of the Mahāyāna. In entering the schools, he inspired the children. In entering the brothels, he revealed the transgressions [that arise from] desire. In entering the wine shops, he was able to maintain his intentions.[2]

[2] 欲度人故以善方便居毘耶離。資財無量攝諸貧民。奉戒清淨攝諸毀禁。以忍調行攝諸恚怒。以大精進攝諸懈怠。一心禪寂攝諸亂意。以決定慧攝諸無智。雖爲白衣奉持沙門清淨律行。雖處居家不著三界。示有妻子常修梵行。現有眷

As we will see, the sūtra also works to deconstruct the apparent duality of truth and skillful means by arguing that truth is simply one more *upāya*, and that whatever is genuinely *upāya* is, ipso facto, true.

This theme of non-duality is also present in the question that animates the sūtra and the surprising answer to that question. The question is this: How does one purify a buddha-world (a domain of awakened action)? In other words, how does one transform the contaminated, impure world of suffering into a pure world in which suffering and its causes have vanished? This, of course, is one way of asking how one accomplishes the principal goal of Buddhist practice, the path from suffering to liberation, only putting it in the Mahāyāna register of achieving this for all sentient beings. One might expect that the answer would be an admonition to practice the arduous path of the bodhisattva, as described in the literature on the stages of the path. The surprising answer in this sūtra, however, is that one does nothing at all: all buddha-worlds—the entire world—are primordially pure, primordially liberated, primordially free from suffering.

This doctrine in turn leads us to another non-duality: that of the conventional and ultimate. The sūtra takes seriously Nāgārjuna's claim in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that there is no difference at all between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, or between dependent origination and emptiness, or between the nature of the Buddha and that of sentient beings, arguing that the conventional world is in fact empty, that sentient beings are in fact free of suffering, and that omniscience is nothing other than ordinary engagement. Delusion is, paradoxically, the failure to understand this; delusion is hence both real and not real. This deconstruction of the apparent duality

屬常樂遠離。雖服寶飾而以相好嚴身。雖復飲食而以禪悅爲味。若至博弈戲處輒以度人。受諸異道不毀正信。雖明世典常樂佛法。一切見敬爲供養中最。執持正法攝諸長幼。一切治生諧偶雖獲俗利不以喜悅。遊諸四衢饒益衆生。入治政法救護一切。入講論處導以大乘。入諸學堂誘開童蒙。入諸婬舍示欲之過。入諸酒肆能立其志 (T.475: 14.539a15–29).

between that of which we can speak and that of which we cannot leads in turn to the deconstruction of the duality between speech and silence, which, as we shall see, is remarkably akin to what we noted in Daoist literature, and which paves the way for the Chan tradition in China.

The most famous moment in the sūtra is the so-called Lion's Roar of Silence in Chapter 9. We will get there, for that moment is deeply and undeniably paradoxical. But to appreciate its power and paradox, we need to stalk it, first by considering its context in the sūtra as a whole, and then in the specific context of an earlier silence, the silence of Śāriputra in Chapter 7.

The paradox of ineffability and the paradox of *upāya* in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* are important for our purposes because here we find a striking case of a sūtra that is working explicitly to assert and to explore paradoxes at the limits of expression. This sūtra opens with a paradox and shows that while it might not be fatal to the Buddhist project, there is no non-paradoxical way of expressing that project. The pattern set by the *Vimalakīrti* is repeated throughout the Chan/Zen tradition.

Context: *Upāya*

The very frame of the sūtra itself is a paradox. The question that motivates the sūtra is Śāriputra's puzzlement over the Buddha's statement that when the mind is pure, the buddha-land is equally pure. This gets Śāriputra wondering, "[The Buddha] says that the when the bodhisattva's mind is pure, the buddha-land is pure. When our World-honored One was a bodhisattva, surely his mind was not impure, and yet this buddha-world is manifestly impure!"[3] A buddha-world is the domain of activity of a buddha, and

[3] 若菩薩心淨則佛土淨者。我世尊本爲菩薩時意豈不淨。而是佛土不淨若此 (T.475: 14.538c6–8).

the present world is the domain of activity of Buddha Śakyamuni. A buddha's perception of the buddha-land is determined by his karma, which in turn determines the state of his mind. If he finds himself in an impure buddha-land, that must be because he has not yet purified himself of all defilements. In this case, the buddha-world in question is that of the Buddha Śakyamuni, and as Śāriputra observes, it seems to be full of excrement, and decidedly impure. That suggests that the Buddha's mind is impure.

While the Buddha responds to this worry by showing Śāriputra through a quick miracle that the world is indeed pure, but appears impure to Śāriputra only in virtue of the impurity of his own mind, this still leaves a problem in place. The cultivation of Buddhahood requires the performance of deeds that reflect the purity of mind. It then appears to be possible only for someone who is already a buddha. But if one is already a buddha, the aspiration to buddhahood constitutive of a bodhisattva is impossible. So the cultivation of the aspiration that is the foundation of the Mahāyāna path is impossible. (We will see this conundrum about the impossibility of attaining buddhahood unless one has already done so repeated in the Chan tradition in Chapter 5.)

This conundrum leads one directly to the central puzzle of the text, that of the domain of *upāya*, or liberative skill. Vimalakīrti, as we have seen, is introduced as the great master of *upāya*. He is a layperson who keeps monastic discipline, a wealthy businessman with no material attachments, a habitué of bars and brothels with perfect ethics, and so on. Vimalakīrti's *upāya* consists in part of his observance of lay and monastic precepts precisely by violating them. To keep the precepts perfectly would be to remain attached to them and to fail to benefit sentient beings maximally. To benefit sentient beings requires observation of precepts without attachment; that in turn, this sūtra suggests, requires violating them, and Vimalakīrti is represented as doing just that. This point is made again and again in the chapter on the reluctance of the bodhisattvas to visit Vimalakīrti, in which Vimalakīrti chides others for

appearing to shed attachment only to retain attachment to that very non-attachment.

Upāya, though, as technique, would appear to make sense only when contrasted with that which is *not upāya*—but that which is nonetheless true. The ruse used by the father to get his children out of the burning house in the *Lotus Sūtra* is *upāya*; the Buddha's suggestion to Kisagotami that she can resurrect her son if she can only find the right mustard seed (one from a household that has never known death) is *upāya.*

Upāya might then be thought to contrast with "straight" Dharma, as a skillful, expedient necessity when telling the truth or acting as one ordinarily ought to would not work, a sort of "what to do until the Buddha comes" second best. These contrast with the case where one simply, straight out tells the truth. "If you don't come out of the house, you will die; there is nothing I can do for you, son." This statement would be true, but unskillful. *Upāya* then contrasts both with mendacity and with literality. To the extent that it is honest, it is figurative and indirect, and makes sense only against a background of the literal and the direct. But the thrust of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* is that all Dharma practice, all speech, including the Dharma itself, is *upāya.*

The sūtra's answer to the frame question is that the buddha-world we inhabit *is* primordially pure and needs no cultivation; it only looks impure to us as a result of the Buddha's *upāya.* By making it appear impure, the Buddha is able to demonstrate the aspiration and the deeds we need to emulate in order to achieve our own cultivation, a cultivation that, paradoxically, is unnecessary given our own primordial purity, one we need to recognize despite, once again, our own primordial awakening. But if we are primordially awakened, there should be no obstacle to the manifestation of that awakening; omniscience obscured is hardly omniscience in fact. The nature of *upāya*, its paradoxical relation to truth, how the manifestation of the impure world is a virtuous manifestation, an indirect, or figurative indication of purity, and how it is possible to

behold an impure world and to achieve awakening are the subjects of the sūtra.

The Silence of Śāriputra

Fast forward to Chapter 7. An army of monks, bodhisattvas, and divine hangers-on are paying a visit to Vimalakīrti, who is malingering in order to provide the occasion for an enlightening salon for those who have come to visit the patient. Just when everything seems to be going well in a long and amusing bedside dialogue, Śāriputra finds himself face to face with a goddess who has been hiding in the closet. It is bad enough that he has been in a house with a woman, but then she garlands him, which constitutes a breach of his monastic vows. He then unwisely initiates the following dialogue (if Vimalakīrti is the embodiment of perfect *upāya* in this dialogue, Śāriputra is the embodiment of perfect liberative ineptitude):

> ŚĀRIPUTRA ASKED, "How long have you been residing in this room?"
>
> ANSWER: "I have resided in this room for as long as you have been liberated."
>
> ŚĀRIPUTRA ASKED, "How long is that?"
>
> THE GODDESS SAID, "How long has it been since you were liberated?"
>
> Śāriputra was silent and did not respond.
>
> THE GODDESS SAID, "What is your great wisdom that you remain silent?"
>
> ANSWER: "Liberation is not something that can be spoken of, so I do not know what to say."
>
> THE GODDESS SAID, "Speech and words are both characteristics of liberation. Why so? Liberation is neither internal, nor external, nor something in between. Words are also neither

> internal, nor external, nor something in between. Therefore, Śāriputra, the explanation of liberation does not lie apart from words. Why so? 'All *dharma*s have the characteristic of liberation.' "[4]

The goddess renders Śāriputra speechless, but he tries to turn his befuddlement into a virtue, by arguing that since the goddess is asking him to talk about liberation, and since liberation is inexpressible, the best he can do is to remain silent. That would be real *upāya*, since anything he would say would be false. (Anyone who has taught Buddhist Studies for any length of time has had a student ask whether she can turn in a blank sheet of paper as a term paper. This is the legacy of Śāriputra.)

The goddess, of course, will have none of this. She asked a simple question, "how long have you been liberated?" There should be an answer to this. After all, the Buddha himself delivered countless discourses after gaining liberation. And if liberation involves the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena, including speech itself, then using empty words to express liberation shouldn't be a bad thing. There are at least two ways to read this silence and its relationship to that of Vimalakīrti in Chapter 9. On one reading, that most frequently represented in the Indian commentarial tradition, Śāriputra just looks lame. His silence does not express anything beyond speech; it doesn't express anything at all. It is a simple failure of *upāya* because there is no context that would make it significant. The goddess has asked a tricky question. Śāriputra must answer from either the conventional perspective or from the ultimate. He has criticized the goddess from a conventional perspective, as violating the ordinary rules of monastic discipline, and so it appears

[4] 舍利弗言。天止此室其已久如。答曰。我止此室如耆年解脱。舍利弗言。止此久耶。天曰。耆年解脱亦何如久。舍利弗默然不答。天曰。如何耆舊大智而默。答曰。解脱者無所言説故吾於是不知所云。天曰。言説文字皆解脱相。所以者何。解脱者不内不外不在兩間。文字亦不内不外不在兩間。是故舍利弗。無離文字説解脱也。所以者何。一切諸法是解脱相 (T.475: 14.548a7–15).

that he should answer from that perspective. But if he answers conventionally, he reifies liberation, treating it as something different from ordinary life. If, on the other hand, he answers from the ultimate perspective, he abandons the ground of his critique of the goddess. Śāriputra is trapped, and so cannot answer, covering his failure with mystification. This will be seen to contrast with Vimalakīrti's skillful silence which succeeds in communicating precisely because of the context in which it occurs.

On another reading, though—one reflected not in India, but in the Chan tradition that we will see recapitulated in the "public case" of the two monks rolling the blinds in Chapter 5—there is no difference at all between these silences other than the fact that one is the silence of Śāriputra and one is the silence of Vimalakīrti. On this reading, while one is tempted to look beyond the surface for an explanation, there is none; there is only a surface, no deeper reality. The distinction and the lack of any ultimate explanation for it is meant to signal the fact that there is no ultimate ground of meaning or of meaninglessness. In this discussion we will focus on the first reading; the second will become relevant in a later chapter, when we consider Chan cases.

The Silence of Vimalakīrti

Now for the first reading. Not all silences are created equal. One way of understanding why Śāriputra's silence is important in this sūtra is grounded in its apparent lack of skillfulness, in contrast with the skillfulness of Vimalakīrti's silence in the next major scene. In this chapter, called "The Dharma Gate of Non-duality," Vimalakīrti opens the discussion by asking, "How does the bodhisattva enter the Dharma gate of non-duality?"[5]

[5] 云何菩薩入不二法門 (T.475: 14.550b29–c1).

In response, bodhisattva after bodhisattva presents a prima facie duality—I and mine, production and destruction, good and evil, mundane and transcendental, and so on—and deconstructs it, stating that to recognize the identity of the two apparent opposites is to enter into the Dharma-door of non-duality. Sometimes there is a bit of argument, sometimes mere pronouncement, but in each case it is clear how one might see what appear to be polar opposites as entirely intertwined and inseparable. Again, exploring each would be interesting, but well beyond the scope of this investigation.

Things begin to come to a climax when Vimalakīrti, having heard from about two dozen middle-level bodhisattvas, turns to Mañjuśrī himself, the bodhisattva of perfect wisdom:

> After all the bodhisattvas had each spoken in turn, [Vimalakīrti] asked Manjuśrī, "How does the bodhisattva enter the dharma gate of non-duality?"
>
> Manjuśrī replied, "In my understanding, it is to be without words and without speech with regard to all *dharma*s. To be without manifestation or consciousness, to transcend all questions and answers, is to enter the dharma gate of non-duality."[6]

Mañjuśrī has a good point. Language itself is shot through with dualism. To assert one thing is to deny another; to characterize anything is to distinguish it from what is not so characterized. Even to say that this is dualistic, and that this is not; that on this side of the gate is the dualistic world of delusion, on that side is the non-dual world of wisdom is dualistic. Note the parallel to the problem with which the sūtra begins: If you start with impurity, you can't get to purity. Why not? The former is shot through with dualism,

[6] 如是諸菩薩各各説已。問文殊師利。何等是菩薩入不二法門。文殊師利曰。如我意者。於一切法無言無説。無示無識離諸問答。是爲入不二法門 (T.475: 14.551c16–19).

and the latter transcends dualism. But to see them as different and to aspire to the pure is to be caught in duality, but if one does not aspire to purity, one can never escape. Nothing one can say can be non-dualistic. Mañjuśrī therefore counsels silence. But, of course, we know from Chapter 7 that silence can get you into trouble. So Mañjuśrī consults Vimalakīrti, the master of *upāya*:

> Manjuśrī then asked Vimalakīrti, "We have each made our own explanations. Sir, you should explain how the bodhisattva enters the Dharma gate of non-duality."
>
> At this point Vimalakīrti was silent, saying nothing.[7]

And here is the lion's roar. Even Mañjuśrī's admonition to silence was verbal, and so dualistic. Even he distinguished speech and silence, the dual and the non-dual. Only by silence, it might appear, can one avoid dualistic speech. But why is this silence effective, whereas Śāriputra's was not? Context is important. Śāriputra lacked the context for his silence to be articulate. The other Bodhisattvas and Mañjuśrī set the context for Vimalakīrti's to be articulate. Just as John Cage's *4'33"* could never have been the first composition in the history of Western classical music, but could be powerful in the 20th century, silence could not constitute *upāya* in Chapter 7, but could in Chapter 9. And it does. Here is how the sūtra continues:

> Manjuśrī exclaimed, "Excellent, excellent! Not to even have words or speech is the true entrance into the Dharma gate of non-duality."
>
> When this "Discourse on Entering the Dharma Gate of Non-duality" was explained, five thousand bodhisattvas within the

[7] 於是文殊師利。問維摩詰。我等各自説已。仁者當説。何等是菩薩入不二法門。時維摩詰默然無言 (T.475: 14.551c20–22; trans. McRae 2004: 148).

> congregation all entered the Dharma gate of non-duality and attained forbearance of the nonarising of *dharma*s.[8]

But now the text brings us back to paradox: While Mañjuśrī might say that "here there is no use for syllables or ideas," he is wrong. For one thing, he has just gone and used them. But for another, the very fact that Vimalalīrti's silence was *articulate* in the context shows that it expressed something, said something, explained something, announced something, and designated something. That is how it transmitted a teaching that enabled those who understood it to enter into non-duality. Articulate silence, silence which conveys something in a context, is a kind of speech, just as Cage's silence is a kind of music. And when Mañjuśrī praises Vimalakīrti's silence and recognizes it as *more* articulate than his own verbal advocacy or silence, he is dualistically distinguishing speech from silence. On the other hand, while he is doing so in speech, Vimalakīrti just did the same thing, only in silence.

Speech and Silence: Truth and *Upāya*

The sūtra hence calls attention at this point to an important paradox of expressibility. Language cannot express the non-dual ultimate, because language itself embodies duality. Only silence can do so. But to the degree that silence succeeds in doing that, it is just more language. To say in language that silence is preferable is to fall back into dualism. But to indicate that by being silent is to render that silence incapable of saying even that, as it pushes that silence back into speech; to the degree that it says anything, it itself

[8] 文殊師利歎曰。善哉善哉。乃至無有文字語言。是眞入不二法門。說是入不二法門品時。於此衆中五千菩薩。皆入不二法門得無生法忍 (T.475: 14.551c23–26; trans. McRae 2009: 148).

is discursive. So we can't say anything about non-dual reality, even that. And shutting up is no help either.

This paradoxical non-duality of speech and silence mirrors the non-duality of literal truth and *upāya*, the direct topic of the *sūtra.* When Śāriputra attempts to abandon speech for the *upāya* of silence, he not only falls into the trap of dualistically distinguishing speech from silence, but also *upāya* from literal truth. And so he fails to exercise *upāya.*

What Mañjuśrī said literally—that language is dualistic and that only silence can express the non-dual ultimate—Vimalakīrti expressed through the *upāya* of silence. But again, the very fact that that his silence was effective renders it communicative, and what it communicates is represented as true, and because true, effective. So, even though *upāya* can only be defined against the literal, it is not different from it. The paradox is this: speech cannot express truth; it is only *upāya.* Only silence can express the truth. But to the extent that silence expresses the truth, it is a kind of speech, one more *upāya.* And so not only can silence—as speech—*not* express the truth, but speech—as an *upāya* non-dually related to silence—can do so. Mañjuśrī might have failed where Vimalakīrti succeeded, but they said the same thing. There appears to be nothing that grounds success in one case and failure in the other, and this nothing seems to be ostended by the silence, which, again, is no different from the speech . . .

We can put this in terms of the two truths, the fundamental Madhyamaka analytical device that motivates this sūtra. Mañjuśrī, in virtue of using language to characterize the non-dual ultimate, succeeds only in characterizing the ultimate from the standpoint of the conventional. The direct object of such expressions is called by Tibetan exegetes the "figurative" (*rnam drang*) ultimate.[9] Because it is expressible, although the ultimate is denoted,

[9] We note that this approach is different from one understanding of the Chan approach, which refuses to reify an "ultimate" to which silence points.

it is denoted only figuratively, or indirectly, through a conventional expression. Vimalakīrti, however, by eschewing all verbal expression, is regarded as directly indicating the inexpressible ultimate. Nonetheless, Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti say the same thing. So the conventional truth expressed by Mañjuśrī and the ultimate truth expressed by Vimalakīrti are in the end identical, even though they are different—one expressible, one inexpressible. The ultimate emptiness of the world, or the world as it is seen from the standpoint of liberation, is thus immediately accessible to anyone who sees the conventional truth as it is.

The homologies of this paradox to those developed in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are striking. The *Laozi* argues that there is a transcendent dimension to reality that is ineffable, and shows that we can say that. That is, we can and cannot speak of it, and we speak truly when we say that we cannot. But just as the *Zhuangzi* argues, even when we recuse ourselves from any speech and maintain silence, we engage in a kind of speech: even a non-point is a point. So, while only a silence beyond language can take us beyond illusory duality, to see that silence as different from speech is to re-inscribe the very duality from which we strive to escape. The whole world is a single point, and to see the inescapability of discourse is to escape its confines.[10]

All of this brings us back to the paradox of *upāya*. The distinction between the two truths is drawn first, in the Pāli canon, in terms of *upāya*. Ultimate truth in that context is truth *simpliciter*, the way things actually are. Conventional truth, on the other hand, is *upāya*, a convenient way to say things so that ordinary people will understand them. Ultimately, we are complexes of constantly changing *skandha*s; but it is an *upāya*, a skillful way of communicating, to use the verbal designation "person," and proper names to refer to the

[10] The homology should not be overstated. Zhuangzi and the *Vimalakīrti* are making different points, even though they are both pointing out the inescapability of discourse. The *Vimalakīrti* is concerned with how to express non-dual ultimate truth; Zhuangzi is pointing out that discourse can neither be undermined nor grounded.

persons that are conventionally real. So, when the dualism of ultimate versus conventional is transcended in the paradoxical identity of the two truths defended by Nāgārjuna and expressed in this sūtra as the primordial purity of the defiled conventional world, the duality of *upāya* versus truth is also transcended in the paradoxical identity of *upāya* and true understanding. The Buddha's *upāya* in manifesting the pure world as impure is hence non-deceptive; the true Dharma is also mere *upāya.*

In that case, how does one transcend the impure and attain purity, or abandon ignorance and attain insight? Easy: by abandoning language to speak the truth, and by abandoning assertion to assert skillfully. This is what the Vimalakīrti says, clearly and without reservation, if through the indirection of a skillfully told tale. These worries about the need and the impossibility of transcending all duality and about the complicated relationship between speech and silence will return in Nishida Kitaro's voice in Chapter 7.

4

Non-dualism of the Two Truths

Sanlun and Tiantai on Contradictions

Yasuo Deguchi

Non-duality

The two previous chapters have been concerned with non-duality—with the idea that the dualities we experience are illusory, and that the fundamental nature of reality is non-dual. This idea, defended in a Buddhist voice in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, and in a Daoist voice in the *Daodejing*, suggests that (ultimate) reality cannot properly be characterized by such dichotomous concepts as *subject* versus *object*, *being* versus *nothing*, *one* versus *many*, and so on. Instead, these non-dualists see reality as transcending such dichotomies, and, because conceptuality is inescapably dualistic, transcending conceptual discrimination.

Nonetheless, non-duality entails neither that reality is entirely undifferentiated nor that it is entirely incapable of being addressed conceptually. Instead, as we have seen in the case of the *Vimalakīrti* and the *Daodejing*, the non-dualist—whether Buddhist or Daoist—employs concepts but tries to do so in a way that points to a non-duality that transcends them. In this chapter, we will see what happens when these ideas from Indian Buddhism and Chinese Daoism come together in the creation of a distinctively Chinese form of Buddhist thought. And we will see that, in the hands of Chinese Buddhist philosophers, one of the central devices for understanding non-duality is the explicit embrace of contradictions.

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This explicit dialetheism (even if not underpinned by self-conscious reflection on logic, per se, as in contemporary dialetheism), already prefigured in the texts we have discussed so far, is a natural response to non-duality. For, one might ask, how is one to use those dichotomous or discriminative concepts in a non-dichotomous or non-discriminating manner? How can one conceptualize the non-conceptualizable nature of reality? It is hard to see how to do so without accepting contradiction: if one can conceptualize it, it is not non-conceptualizable. But if one knows that it is non-conceptualizable, one has deployed at least that concept. And so, we will see, Sanlun and Tiantai Buddhist philosophers articulated their respective accounts of non-duality through the assertion of contradiction. That is, they are each committed to dialetheism. In this chapter, we explore the contradictions those schools employed as their conceptual expressions of the non-duality of the two truths, a doctrine they inherit from Indian Madhyamaka and the commentarial tradition grounded in the work of Nāgārjuna.

Historical Background

As we noted in Chapter 1, the doctrine of two truths—that there are two sorts of truth, viz., the ultimate, or that which is known by the awakened, and the conventional, or that which is apprehended by ordinary beings—predated Nāgārjuna. In the view of earlier Buddhist exegetes, the ultimate mode of reality is radically different from its common sense and conventional one: common-sense entities, such as a table and a person, may exist conventionally, but this is not their real mode of existence; *ultimately* they are nothing but constructions out of momentary property instantiations (*dharma*s).

But Buddhists could not simply deny the truth of the common-sense view or the reality of the entities we encounter in everyday life: if they did, they couldn't give any significance to the Buddhist path to awakening, since the path presupposes such common-sense entities as people, suffering, and its causes. If the Buddhist project of solving the problem of suffering is to make any sense at all, Buddhists must accept the reality of the conventional world in some sense, even if they deny it in another. Nonetheless, according to most Buddhist philosophers prior to Nāgārjuna, the conventional and the ultimate truths are different, constituting either two different perspectives on reality, or, in schools such as Sautrāntika, two different levels of reality. On this understanding, the two truths constitute a duality.

Nāgārjuna inherited this distinction between the two truths. But having inherited the distinction, he transformed it, erasing the dichotomy between the truths. In his view, that dichotomy invites both the reification of the ultimate truth, and hence attachment to it, and nihilism with respect to the conventional, and hence deprecation of it. According to Nāgārjuna, then, to remain content with the view that there *is* a distinction between the two truths is dangerous. So, in addition to *distinguishing* between them, he also argued that there is *no distinction* between them. In the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (hereafter: MMK) we find him saying at 24:8–10:

8. The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma
Is based on two truths:
A truth of worldly convention
And an ultimate truth.

9. Those who do not understand
The distinction between these two truths
Do not understand
The Buddha's profound teaching.

10. Without depending on the conventional truth,
The meaning of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the meaning of the ultimate,
Nirvana is not achieved. [1]

Here he clearly distinguishes the two truths, and in a way quite congenial to the view of the tradition he inherits. But a few verses later, at 24.18, he writes:

24. Whatever is dependent origination
We explain to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way. [2]

"Whatever is dependent origination" refers to conventional entities, while "emptiness" refers to the ultimate. So the first sentence asserts the non-distinction between the two truths; in the second, Nāgārjuna asserts that even that identification of the conventional and the ultimate is itself conventional, and therefore ultimate.

Thus, Nāgārjuna's account of the relation between the two truths is already pregnant with paradox: they are asserted to be both distinct (24.8–10) and not distinct from one another (24.18). Many Indian and Tibetan commentators see this to be a problem to be solved hermeneutically and developed non-paradoxical interpretations of Nāgārjuna's account, all of which seem somewhat artificial and forced. (See, for instance, Tsongkhapa 2006.) We will not consider that line of interpretation here. When Nāgārjuna's philosophy was transplanted to China, this apparent problem was transplanted

[1] *Dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā | lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ || ye 'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayor dvayoḥ | te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīre buddhaśāsane || vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate | paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate* (24.8–10; trans. Garfield 1995: 68).

[2] *Yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe | sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā || apratītya samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate | yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate* (24.18–19; trans. Garfield 1995: 69).

along with it. But as we will see, Chinese Mādhyamikas, including those in the Sanlun and Tiantai traditions, saw non-duality from a different perspective: they saw the paradoxes not as a problem, but as an indication of the nature of truth.

The story of the transmission of Buddhism to China is long and complex, and it is largely beyond the scope of this study. Our tale begins with the central Asian monk translator Kumārajīva. Kumārajīva translated Nāgārjuna's main texts, including the MMK and many other important Mahāyāna works, from Sanskrit to Chinese in Xi'an, in the early years of the 5th century. Kumārajīva's translation of the MMK (really that of a team of scholars who collaborated under Kumārajīva's supervision, see Funayama 2013), with the Piṅgala commentary, constituted the foundation of the development of Madhyamaka in China and other East Asian regions for centuries to come.[3]

The Madhyamaka exegetical tradition that emerged from Kumārajīva's translation team came to be known as Sanlun (Three Treatises). Sengzhao 僧肇 (374–414) is probably the best known of the early Sanlun commentators, but the school's most prolific writer is Jizang 吉藏 (549–623). Modern scholarship has established that some texts traditionally attributed to Jizang were actually composed by another hand, or even other hands (Itō 2009). We refer to that unknown writer or writers as pseudo-Jizang. The Sanlun tradition was not alone in China in claiming Nāgārjuna's mantle. Among others who claimed to be his followers is Jizang's contemporary and interlocutor Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597). His Tiantai school grew to be one of the dominant Buddhist schools in China and Japan.

It is instructive to begin by comparing Kumārajīva's Chinese translation MMK 24.18 with its Sanskrit original. The translation reads:

[3] Piṅgala is a 4th-century Indian commentator. Nothing is known about him other than his putative authorship of this commentary, which exists only in Chinese translation.

> All things that arise through causes and conditions I explain as non-existent; they are also provisional designations. This is also the meaning of the middle path.[4]

Unlike the original Sanskrit,[5] or the Tibetan that follows it closely, this Chinese translation has three occurrences of "this" (*shi* 是). So the phrase has come to be called the "three 'thises' verse."[6] Philosophers in Chinese Madhyamaka schools then read the subject of each of the verses as referring to one and the same thing, namely: *whatever arises dependent upon causes and conditions*. Drawing on Piṅgala's commentary on the verse, they also interpreted "non-existent" as denoting the ultimate truth, "provisional designation" as denoting the conventional truth, and "the middle path" as detachment from both of the two truths.[7]

Thus this translation, seen through this commentary, restructures the verse: the three principal terms, "conventional truth," "ultimate truth," and "the middle path," are taken to be co-referential, and each to refer to whatever dependently originates.[8] This reading raises the problem of the simultaneous distinction between, and non-duality of, the two truths in a new context: how are we to understand the relationship between the two truths, on the one hand, and the middle path, on the other? Although, as we shall see, Sanlun and Tiantai disagree about how to interpret the middle

[4] 衆因緣生法。我説即是無。亦爲是假名。亦是中道義 (T.1564: 30.33b11–12).

[5] *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣnahe*.

[6] 三是偈. This common name origins from Jizang's interpretation of *the meaning of the three 'this'* (三是義) as co-referential (T.1824: 42.152.b8–13).

[7] The Piṅgala commentary doesn't take the three "thises" as co-referential. In accordance with the Sanskrit original, it takes the second "this" as anaphoric to "nothing" or to "emptiness," rather than to "whatever dependently originates."

[8] This restructuring is evident in the Sanlun and Tiantai school's paraphrases of the verse. The Sanlun rephrased it as "whatever arises though causes and conditions is the conventional truth. 'This is empty' means the ultimate truth. 'This also means the middle way' is the essence." 因緣生法是俗諦。即是空是眞諦。亦是中道義是體 (T.1853: 45.19b19–20). The Tiantai paraphrase will be cited later.

path, both assumed this hermeneutical context, and both saw it as engendering paradox.

Jizang's Hierarchy

Let's first examine the Sanlun school's attempt to conceptualize the non-duality of the two truths. Jizang and pseudo-Jizang take the two truths to comprise conceptual descriptions of reality, rather than reality itself, thus committing to paradox at a linguistic level, even if not at a metaphysical level.[9] They also claim that the middle path is the non-dual nature of reality.[10] True linguistic expressions should be faithful to reality. So, the two truths, despite their difference, must somehow individually and jointly capture this non-dualistic truth. From the perspective of Sanlun, then, the challenge is how to express the non-dual truth of the middle way in terms of dichotomies like "ultimate" and "conventional."

Jizang approaches this task by converting Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the two truths into a hierarchy of positions, creating something akin to a Hegelian dialectical structure in which contradictions emerge, are affirmed, and are sublated in successive levels. Let's call this system *Jizang's hierarchy*.

Jizang first constructed a three-level hierarchy, which he calls the three-fold-two-truths, and then added a fourth level to get the four-fold-two-truths.[11] Pseudo-Jizang inherited the four-level model and developed it in his own fashion. In exploring these articulations of the doctrine of the two truths, we will see an explicit embrace of contradictions at multiple levels of this dialectic.

[9] "The two truths are merely [conceptual] doctrines [and therefore] don't concern the realm of reality" 二諦唯是教門不關境理 (T.1853: 45.15a16–17).

[10] T1853: 45.19b19–20. As mentioned earlier, the middle path is taken to represent the fundamental truth or "essence."

[11] 三種二諦 (T.1824: 42.278b05, 53c17; T.1854: 45.80b18–19, 90c18–22, 94b14–15). 四重二諦 (T.1824: 42.28b11; T.1853: 45.15c13, 24a23).

The Hierarchy of Truth

Jizang and pseudo-Jizang's hierarchies are both pedagogical and polemical. The two of them note, as did Indian commentators on Nāgārjuna such as Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti, that it is difficult for ordinary people to attain awakening. Therefore, it is necessary to educate them step by step, progressing from a lower to a higher stage of realization. A stepwise hierarchy is fit for such gradual education. So in the hierarchy, each earlier level corresponds to a lower stage of accomplishment that is to be overcome by the next level that corresponds to a higher stage of realization (T.1854: 45.90c26–91a3).

But the hierarchy is also polemical. In the period in which Jizang and pseudo-Jizang worked, many accounts of the two truths were proposed by adherents of the Sanlun school as well as by others. So, the two Jizangs needed to defend their own view. In the hierarchy, each earlier stage represents a rival view that is to be overcome by their own view, which corresponds to the final stage (T.1854: 45.91a16–b19).

Let us begin by examining Jizang's explanation of the three-level hierarchy in terms of gradual education. In his *Treatise on the Two Truths*, he writes:

> All of the three stages of two truths are a means to gradual abandonment, like a construction rising from the ground. Why? Ordinary people believe that everything is in fact existent, and don't know that it is not existent. Therefore the Buddha preached that everything is ultimately empty and is not existent.[12]

At each stage in the hierarchy, a doctrine that is plausible, and indeed that gets at part of the truth, but yet is ultimately deluded, is rejected in favor of a more sophisticated doctrine that more closely

[12] 此三種二諦。並是漸捨義。如從地架而起　。何者。凡夫之人。謂諸法實録是有。不知無所有。是故諸仏為説諸法畢竟空無所有 (T.1854: 45.90c26–29).

approximates ultimate truth. Each doctrine and its rejection constitute a pair that provides the ground for the succeeding stage.

The starting point is the claim that everything exists, and its negation, that everything is empty, or non-existent. The first is the naïve view of mundane beings, and while it is conventionally true, if it were taken as more than that, it would lead one to commit the error of reification, of the superimposition of intrinsic reality on that which lacks it. This is why its negation is also true: everything is *non-existent* in that it lacks intrinsic reality; it is ultimately empty. This is effectively Nāgārjuna's doctrine. Jizang explains this dichotomy in more detail as follows:

> The statement that everything exists is ordinary people's claim of existence. This is the common or ordinary truth. The sages truly know that the nature of everything is empty. This is the ultimate truth or the truth of the sages. The doctrine of two truths at the first level is explicated so as to allow [ordinary people] to enter into the ultimate from the conventional and to abandon the ordinary so as to obtain the truth of the sages.[13]

Conventional truth is that everything exists. Ultimate truth is that everything is non-existent. So, at level one of the dialectic, we assert the following:

(1c)	Everything is existent.	(conventionally)
(1u)	Everything is non-existent.	(ultimately)

This dichotomy is, however, in Jizang's hands just a starting point. (1c) and (1u) constitute a duality, and that duality must be transcended. As Jizang puts it:

[13] 言諸法有者凡夫謂有此是俗諦。此是凡諦。賢聖眞知諸法性空。此是眞諦此是聖諦。令其從俗入眞捨凡取聖。為是義故。明初節二諦義也 (T.1854: 45.90c29–91a3).

> Next is the second stage, where existence-and-non-existence is the conventional truth and *non-duality* is the ultimate truth. This means that existence and non-existence constitute two sides, one of which is existence and the other is non-existence. Additionally, permanence versus non-permanence and life-and-death versus nirvāṇa also constitute two sides. Since the conventional versus the ultimate and life-and-death versus nirvāṇa constitute two sides, they are taken to be the conventional truth. [On the other hand] since neither-the-ultimate-nor-the-conventional (非眞非俗) and neither-life-and-death-nor-nirvāṇa are non-dual and the middle path, they are taken to be the ultimate truth.[14]

The conventional truth at the second stage summarizes the first stage: there are two truths. Thus, at this stage, both existence and non-existence are asserted as true, albeit in different senses. As a consequence, the conventional truth at this level is committed to such dichotomies as existence versus non-existence, permanence versus non-permanence, and so on. In contrast, the ultimate at the second stage repudiates those dichotomies, by claiming that insofar as existence and non-existence constitute a duality, they cannot be asserted as true, since truth is non-dual. So at the second stage we have the following picture:

(1c)	Everything is existent.	(conventionally)
(1u)	Everything is non-existent.	(ultimately)
(2c)	(1c) *and* (1u)	(conventionally)
(2u)	*Neither* (1c) *nor* (1u)	(ultimately)

[14] 次第二重。明有無為世諦不二為眞諦者。明有無是二邊。有是一邊無是一邊。 乃至常無常生死涅槃並是二邊。以眞俗生死涅槃是二邊故。所以為世諦。非眞非俗非生死非涅槃不二中道。為第一義諦也 (T.1854: 45.91a4–8). Note that Jizang identifies the conventional realm with the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra) and ultimate reality with nirvāṇa.

Jizang has, in effect, taken us through the four stages of the *catuṣkoṭi* (the four corners, or the Buddhist partition of logical space, according to which sentences can be true, false, both, or neither). The first *koṭi* is the conventional truth at the first stage, the second the ultimate truth at the first stage, the third (both) is the conventional truth at the second stage, and the fourth (neither) is the ultimate truth at the second stage.

But we are not finished yet. The situation with respect to the conventional and ultimate at this stage is exactly the same as that we encounter at the first: they constitute a duality, and like any duality, this one can only be conventional. We have to overcome that duality if we are to understand the ultimate. We must therefore repeat the same process once again. As Jizang puts it:

> Next is the third stage, where the dual and the non-dual constitute the conventional truth and neither-dual-nor-non-dual the ultimate. Earlier, it was explained that since the ultimate versus the conventional and life-and-death versus nirvāṇa are two sides and therefore biased, they were taken as the conventional, whereas since neither-the-ultimate-nor-the-conventional and neither-life-and-death-nor-nirvāṇa are non-dual and the middle path, they were taken as the ultimate. [However] they also constitute two sides. Why? The dual is biased and the non-dual is middle. The biased is one side while the middle is another side. Thus the biased and the middle again constitute two sides. Since it is two sided, it is called conventional truth. Therefore neither-the-biased-nor-the-middle is the middle path and the ultimate truth.[15]

[15] 次第三重。二與不二為世諦。非二非不二為第一義諦者。前明眞俗生死涅槃二邊。是偏故為世諦。　非眞非俗非生死非涅槃不二中道。為第一義。此亦是二邊。何者。二是偏不二是中。　偏是一邊中是一邊。　偏之與中還是二邊。二邊故名世諦。非偏非中乃是中道第一義諦也 (T.1854: 45.91a8–14).

At the second stage we have duality and non-duality. This is itself a duality, and so must itself be overcome. The conventional truth at the third stage represents the duality between duality and non-duality, by summarizing, as before, the earlier stage: both existent and non-existent and neither existent nor-non-existent. In contrast, the ultimate at the third stage is the non-duality between duality and non-duality. Thus we have the following picture:

(1c)	Everything is existent.	(conventionally)
(1u)	Everything is non-existent.	(ultimately)
(2c)	(1c) *and* (1u)	(conventionally)
(2u)	*Neither* (1c) *nor* (1u)	(ultimately)
(3c)	(1c) and (1u) are dual.	(conventionally)
(3u)	(1c) and (1u) are non-dual.	(ultimately)

At each stage, the conventional and the ultimate at the previous stage are both seen to be merely conventional, and the denial of both is then the ultimate, at least for a moment in the dialectic.

Jizang later in his career, as well as pseudo-Jizang, came to confront a new rival for their polemics: early Chinese Yogācāra, which took as one of their primary Indian sources Asaṅga's *The Mahāyāna Compendium (Mahāyānasaṃgraha*; Hirai 1969: 67). To accommodate this position in their hierarchy, they added a fourth level to their edifice.

> Fourthly, followers of *The Mahāyāna Compendium* also claim that [Yogācāra's] three-nature [theory] is conventional and the three-non-nature or undefined-truth is ultimate. So let's explain [our stance] as follows. All of your [claims of] interdependence-and-discrimination [i.e., the three natures], two-truths-and-non-duality or defined truth [on the one hand] and non-duality-non-non-duality, three-non-nature or

> undefined-truth [on the other] is our conventional truth. The forgetfulness of words and annihilation of thoughts is nothing but ultimate truth.[16]

Here, the Jizangs rephrase the Yogācāra account of the three natures, taking defined-truth as the meaning of "two-truths-and-non-duality," which corresponds to the conventional at the third level, while the three naturelessnesses and undefined-truth are indicated by the "non-duality and non-non-duality" in the ultimate truth at the third level. They then combine those two truths at the next level so as to form the conventional truth at the fourth level. Thus the central Yogācāra metaphysical theses are regarded as merely conventionally true at the fourth stage. The Jizangs then posit the stage of "the forgetfulness of words and annihilation of thoughts" as a fourth ultimate, *viz.*, the inexpressibility of reality:

(1c)	Everything is existent.	(conventionally)
(1u)	Everything is non-existent.	(ultimately)
(2c)	(1c) *and* (1u)	(conventionally)
(2u)	*Neither* (1c) *nor* (1u)	(ultimately)
(3c)	(1c) and (1u) are dual.	(conventionally)
(3u)	(1c) and (1u) are non-dual.	(ultimately)
(4c)	(1c) are both dual and non-dual.	(conventionally)
(4u)	forget words; annihilate thoughts	(ultimately)

From the second stage of the hierarchy on, the Jizangs not only explicitly refer to, but also affirm, multiple contradictions, at first

[16] 四者大乘師復言。三性是俗。三無性非安立諦爲眞諦。故今明。汝依他分別二眞實不二是安立諦。非二非不二-三無性非安立諦皆是我俗諦。言忘慮絶方是眞諦 (T.1853: 45.15c20–23).

concerning existence and non-existence, and then concerning the duality of existence and non-existence. These contradictions are affirmed explicitly; they are taken to accurately express the truth. The fact that they are each sublated at the subsequent level of the hierarchy does not undermine the fact that they are each *accepted* at the level at which they occur; moreover, they are each sublated at a higher level that is itself inconsistent, an exchange of one paradox for another, rather than a resolution of paradox altogether.

Although the Jizangs themselves do not raise this question explicitly, we might well ask whether the Jizang hierarchy should stop at the fourth stage, or whether it should go further. And once we do so, we must concede that it should continue further—indeed, ad infinitum. For, if we stop at any stage, we are trapped in a dichotomy between the conventional and the ultimate at that stage, and these dichotomies are precisely what Jizang is trying to avoid. To avoid these dualities, we are forced by the logic of the dialectic go on to the next stage and so on forever. The contradictions seem to be inescapable.

We think that Jizang, and especially pseudo-Jizang, should have agreed with us. After all, pseudo-Jizang characterized the final move of his four-fold process—the fourth ultimate—as forgetfulness of words and annihilation of thoughts, or in terms of the *catuṣkoṭi*, the denial of all four corners. This suggests that we could end the process only when we appeal to non-verbal and non-discursive intuition, but even the expression "forget words; annihilate thoughts" is a verbal expression of a thought, and so must be overcome. So we cannot escape from the endless process as long as we still conceive of the nature of reality through language. And every finite step of the hierarchy is verbal and conceptual, so, only when this hierarchy is an infinite series can it transcend duality at its limit point.[17]

[17] For more on this topic, see Priest 2018, ch. 7.

Sanlun Dialetheism

Both Jizangs are committed to contradictions, especially from the second stage on. What, we must now ask, do those dialetheias mean? And by embracing dialetheism do they claim that reality itself is inconsistent, or just our descriptions of it? These questions require careful consideration.

There are two possibilities: either language can be understood as representing reality, and truth therefore as correct representation, or language can be seen as an independent pragmatic device, with truth counting simply as success, or aptness of expression. Let us begin with the first possibility.

As we have seen, each contradiction is just one step in a hierarchy. If we remain at any stage, we are trapped in a dichotomy and cannot escape from that duality without ascending to the next stage. This means that no single contradiction can represent the non-duality that Sanlun theorists say characterizes truth. Only the hierarchy as a whole can express that non-duality. But since at any finite iteration, the hierarchy is always incomplete, in the Sanlun framework non-duality can be expressed only as an endless process of dialectical ascent. The contradictions we encounter at every stage are essential to the conceptual representation of truth of non-duality as moments of this infinite ascent. So, even though each contradiction turns out to be provisional, each is indispensable: without affirming them, we cannot continue.

Nonetheless, none of these contradictions are taken to express the nature of reality; the commitment to them at each stage is, from their standpoint, an artifact of the impossibility of language to characterize reality. So, while at each stage, contradictions must be asserted, and indeed provisionally endorsed, they are endorsed only as stages of a dialectic. To put this another way, the Jizangs, like Vimalakīrti, in the end endorse a rhetoric of silence; but unlike the account in the

Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra, they postpone that silence to the end of an infinite process. So they suggest a never-ending dialectical process in which linguistic or conceptual dualities are overcome though a process of sublation.

The Jizangs, then, are at best *qualified* dialetheists: while they do not assert that *reality* is contradictory, they are committed to the necessarily contradictory nature of *anything we can say about it*, demonstrating the inadequacy of any consistent theory to reality. We now turn to the Chinese Tiantai tradition—a tradition deeply indebted to Sanlun—to see how this nascent dialetheism develops into a thoroughgoing commitment to the inconsistency of reality.

The Tiantai Doctrine of Three Truths

The Tiantai approach to the problem of the non-duality of the two truths is considerably different from the Sanlun solution. Most conspicuously, Tiantai scholars adopted a doctrine of *three truths*, whereas Sanlun scholars saw only two.

Zhiyi, the founder of the Tiantai school, took up the idea of the three truths, an idea already current in China, and polished it into the idea of the complete fusion of three truths.[18] The idea of three truths originated from the standard Chinese translation of MMK 24.18. As noted earlier, owing to the wording of Kumārajīva's translation, the verse was interpreted as linking three co-referential concepts; the empty, the provisional, and the middle path. In an apocryphal sutra—*The Jeweled Necklace Sūtra* (*Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經), composed in China in the late 5th century after the translation of MMK (Sato 1929a, 1929b)—these three concepts are called *being-truth*, *nothing-truth*, and *middle-path-ultimate-truth*, respectively. [19] Another apocryphal sūtra, *The*

[18] 三諦圓融 (T.1853: 45.19b24–25).
[19] 有諦無諦中道第一義諦 (T.1485: 24.1018b21–23).

Benevolent Kings Sūtra (*Renwang jing* 仁王經) composed somewhat later, refers to them collectively as *three truths*.[20] Jizang reports that some scholars before him had used this term,[21] but that there was no need for it, because the three truths could easily be incorporated into the second stage of his hierarchy by taking the first two truths as the conventional truth and the third as the ultimate truth at that stage.[22]

The philosophical motivation for the invention of the third truth is obvious. It was introduced to overcome the duality between the two truths, by mediating or sublating the opposition between them. It was also expected to resolve the apparent contradiction in MMK between their difference and identity, parameterizing it away by distinguishing between two moments of the dialectic of sublation. The distinction is ascribed to the phase prior to the sublation, and the identity to the posterior stage.

Zhiyi wasn't satisfied with this sublation strategy. He criticized this strategy by calling it a "divided and processed three-truths."[23] By saying that it is divided, he means that there still remains discrimination among the three.[24] The three truths had been introduced to overcome a dichotomy. But, he argued, the three truths approach simply invites more conceptual discrimination—indeed, it replaces a dichotomy with a trichotomy. To evade one kind of distinction, it introduces another. So according to Zhiyi's diagnosis, the three truths approach so far is not successful in overcoming dualistic thinking.

[20] See T.245: 8.827b28, c1, c6, c9, c19, 829b28, b29.

[21] T.1854: 45.91b19–20.

[22] 明三種二諦。有時開則有三諦。有諦無諦非有非無中道第一義諦。有時攝三諦爲二諦。有無並世諦。非有非無爲第一義諦。乃至二不二爲世諦。非二非不二爲第一義諦。就此而論。則無出二諦 (T.1854: 45.114a22–26).

[23] 隔歷三諦 (T.1716: 33.682a2).

[24] The three truths are called *processed* because, Zhiyi claims, there remains a difference in process from our meditation on one of the three truths to that of another, in such a way that we meditate on the ultimate truth *and then* go on to meditate on the middle.

Complete Fusion of the Three Truths

Zhiyi's approach to eradicating the trichotomy is to introduce a new relation, that of *complete fusion* among the three truths. He explains this idea as follows.

> The three truths completely fuse with one another in such a manner that one is three and three is one.[25]

> [The three truths are] not three but three, and three but not three. . . . Let us use the metaphor of a clear mirror: the clear [surface] is the empty, the image is the provisional, and the mirror [itself] is the middle. [Those are] neither combined nor dispersed. The combination and the dispersion exactly match with each other. One is neither two nor three, but does not hinder two and three.[26]

But what do expressions like "three is one" or "three but not three" mean? The answer is not simple. Our analysis will begin with Zhiyi's views on the three truths.

Zhiyi on the Three Truths

To begin, let's examine Zhiyi's paraphrase of MMK 24.18: "What dependently originates is empty, provisional, and middle."[27] Zhiyi glosses the phrase "What dependently originates" as "what is ubiquitous."[28] This phrase, he argues, denotes everything, or reality. He takes it that the three truths—the empty, the provisional, and

[25] 三諦圓融一三三一 (T.1716: 33.705a6–7).
[26] 非三而三三而不三 。. . . 譬如明鏡。明喻即空 。像喻即假.鏡喻即中 。不合不散.合散宛然 。不一二三二三無妨 (T.1911: 46.8c29–9a04).
[27] 因緣所生法 。即空即假即中 (T.1800: 39.969b9; T.1911: 46.25b18, 67b14–15, 84b28–29; T.1716: 33.682c6).
[28] 因緣所生法者 。即遍一切處也 (T.1716: 33.682c8–9).

the middle—are properties of all conditioned things: conditioned things are empty, provisional, and middle.

But what sort of properties are they? Zhiyi considers several possibilities. One of those, which he rejects immediately, is that they constitute an exhaustive and mutually exclusive partition of the world.[29] We might call this a *categorical* understanding of the three truths. On such a view, everything would be either provisional, empty, or middle—exclusively and exhaustively. Zhiyi argues that the three truths are *non-categorical* in that they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, he characterized the relation among the three truths as "non-distinction," meaning that there is no middle that is separated from the provisional and the empty.[30] This characterization can be construed as denying the mutual exclusion among the three: there is something that has those properties conjointly.

Whether categorical or non-categorical, the three truths must be true of all conditioned entities. The provisional means *dependent origination* (T.1911: 46.63a7). The empty means vacuity 虛 or *falsity of interdependence*.[31] The middle is *non-duality* 不二. The prime example of the middle is the non-duality of the two truths: following Piṅgala's commentary, Zhiyi often described it as being detached from the two truths.[32] The middle here is the non-duality of the conventional and the ultimate truths. Zhiyi repeatedly wrote that no single colored object and no single scented object could escape the middle way.[33] So it can't be his view that the two truths are properties of things while the third truth represents the relation between those properties, with the two truths on the object level and the truth of the middle path constituting a meta-truth about them. Instead, he takes it that the three truths are on

[29] 世界隔別 (T.1716: 33.799b28; T1911: 46 28a27).
[30] 非離空有外別有中道故言不異 (T.1716: 33.682c4).
[31] 能體達俗虛即是真 (T.1911: 46.27c11–12).
[32] "Since mind is clear and pure, it is independent of the two sides [i.e., two truths]. It enters into the middle way and illuminates both of the two truths" 心既明淨雙遮二邊。正入中道雙照二諦 (T.1911: 46.17a9–10).
[33] 一色一香無非中道 (T.1716: 33.683a7; T.1911: 46.1c24–25).

the same logical level. As we will see, this is important: this is the core of the Tiantai commitment to explaining the contradictory nature of our descriptions of reality by demonstrating that truth itself is contradictory. The paradoxes, according to Tiantai theorists, are not artifacts of language; they reflect the inconsistency of the world itself.

One Category

Zhiyi rejects any distinction among the three truths. He writes:

> The *Nirvāna sūtra* says: the so-called two truths are in fact one. It is said to be two just as a skillful means, just as a drunkard sees that the sun and the moon rotate and says that they rotate and don't rotate, while a sober person sees only their non-rotation but no rotation. While referring to rotations and therefore the two truths, Mahāyāna sūtras affirm only non-rotation and therefore one truth.[34]

> The Complete Teaching [that is Tiantai doctrine] discloses only one real truth. The *Nirvāna sūtra* says that, though there is in fact one truth, the two truths are mentioned just as a skillful means. Following this remark, even though there is only one truth, the three truths are mentioned merely as a skillful means.[35]

By carving reality into three distinct classes, it might appear that the idea of the three truths creates distinctions among things. But

[34] 大經云。所言二諦其實是。一方便說二。如醉未吐見日月轉謂有轉日及不轉日。醒人但見不轉不見於轉。轉二-爲麁不轉爲妙。三藏全是轉二。同彼醉人。諸大乘經帶轉二說不轉一 (T.1716: 33.705a14–19).

[35] 圓教但明一實諦。大經云。實是一諦方便說三。今亦例此。實是一諦方便說三 (T.1911: 46.28b12–13).

this claim that there is really only one truth is a rejection of any conceptual discrimination. Zhiyi hence resolves the apparent predicament of a trichotomy by introducing only one truth, that is, a unitary understanding of reality. Though still a category, because it is unitary, it has no discriminative function.

So, the three truths as categories are reduced to one. But Zhiyi never stopped talking about threeness in his thesis of one-is-three-and-three-is-one, or in his mirror metaphor. So, while the three truths are completely fused, there remains a distinction between them. We now turn to that distinction.

As observed earlier, the three truths are extensionally identical. But, as shown here, there still remains a distinction with respect to their intensions or conceptual contents. The conventional, empty, and middle truths denote the interdependence, the falsity or deceptiveness of that interdependence, and the non-duality of interdependence and its deceptive character, respectively. The threeness or distinction among the three truths constitutes an intensional difference among these properties. They are extensionally one but intensionally three.

Zhiyi does not divide reality into three categories, each of which has just one of the three properties. Rather all of reality instantiates each of the three properties. Zhiyi writes:

> One is empty; everything is empty—there is no provisional and no middle that is not empty. Everything is discerned as empty. One is provisional; everything is provisional truth—there is no empty and no middle that is not provisional. Everything is discerned as provisional. One middle is all middles—there is no empty and no provisional that are not middle. Everything is discerned as middle.[36]

[36] 一空一切空無假中而不空。總空觀也。一假一切假無空中而不假。總假觀也。一中一切中無空假而不中。總中觀也 (T.1911: 46.55b15–17).

Here he seems to identify extensionally any two of the three truths with the remaining one: something empty and middle is also something provisional, for instance. In effect, he claimed that everything has the properties of being provisional, empty, and middle at the same time. Thus the apparent contradiction in Zhiyi's remarks on the complete fusion, such that one is three and three is one, appears to have been parameterized away by introducing the distinction between a category and mere property, and the distinction between extension and intension, at least for now.

Tiantai Dialetheism

The apparent resolution of contradiction by appeal to complete fusion, however, is just a ruse. The contradiction it apparently resolves only returns in another form. The three truths are not merely intensionally distinct, but are also inconsistent with one another. The provisional and the empty contradict each other: the former affirms interdependence, while the latter denies its reality. Moreover, since they oppose each other and so constitute a dichotomy, they jointly imply the duality between conventional and ultimate. On the other hand, the middle affirms the non-duality between them, and thus delivers another contradiction. Thus, by claiming that reality has these three properties at the same time, Zhiyi commits himself to the claim that truth—and not only our representation of it—is inconsistent.

Zhiyi and his school inherited a series of problems from Nāgārjuna: (1) how to reconcile a radically counter-intuitive Buddhist view of truth with the commitment to the truth of a common-sense view of reality; (2) how to avoid attachment to nirvāna while taking it to be the supreme goal; (3) how to avoid a rejection of the conventional despite taking it to be entirely deceptive; and (4) how to reconcile two truths with a non-dual vision of reality. While the problems they inherit are the same as those

inherited by their Sanlun colleagues, their approach is different from that pursued by Sanlun exegetes. Instead of positing a dialectical hierarchy in which contradictions are successively affirmed and resolved, leading to a silence at the end, Tiantai posits a single panorama in which all three aspects of reality are affirmed, while their inconsistency is accepted. Instead of seeing the expression of truth as necessarily contradictory, but remaining agnostic about reality itself, the Tiantai tradition affirms the inconsistency of the world as an explanation of the inconsistencies to which we are driven in describing it.

Unlike the Jizangs, Zhiyi doesn't subscribe to the idea that there are different aspects or levels of reality. On his account, the three truths are about one single contradictory reality. How do we reconcile the apparent tensions between the conventional and the ultimate? How do we resolve the apparent duality or contradiction among them? Zhiyi's answer is not to resolve it, but to accept it. In order to understand reality, our task is to face the inconsistency and embrace it.[37]

Conclusion

We have examined the Sanlun and Tiantai schools' attempts to conceptualize the tension between the two or three truths. These are similar in some ways and dissimilar in others. Both of them take some contradictions to be true in their conceptual expression of the non-duality. In the Jizang hierarchy, contradictions emerge in the process of trying to express or conceptualize non-duality, and hence reflect properties of language and discursive thought. In Tiantai, however, they are the full expression of the round fusion of the three truths, and so have genuine ontological significance.

[37] For more detailed discussions, see Deguchi 2016.

5
Chan Cases

Robert H. Sharf

Introduction: Mountains Are Just Mountains

The Chan master Qingyuan Weixin of Jizhou ascended the high seat and said: "Thirty years ago, before this old monk had begun to practice *chan*, I saw mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers. Then later on I came face to face with a teacher and made some headway, and I saw that mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers. But now, having reached a place of rest, I once again see that mountains are just mountains and rivers are just rivers. To all of you I ask, as for these three ways of understanding, are they the same or are they different? Should there be a monastic or layperson among you who can find a way out of this, I will acknowledge your having come face to face with this old monk."[1]

[1] 吉州青原惟信禪師，上堂曰：老僧三十年前未參禪時，見山是山，見水是水。及至後來親見知識有箇入處，見山不是山，見水不是水。而今得箇休歇處，依前見山只是山，見水只是水。大眾：這三般見解，是同是別？有人緇素得出，許汝親見老僧. The earliest extant source for this anecdote appears to be the *Jiatai pudenglu* 嘉泰普燈錄, compiled in 1204 by Leian Zhengshou 雷庵正受 (1146–1208; X.1559: 79.327a24–b4). It is reproduced, with minor changes, in a number of later Chan collections, including the *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 compiled in 1253 by Dachuan Puji 大川普濟 (1179–1253; X.1565: 80.361c12–16); *Xu chuandeng lu* 續傳燈錄 (14th century; T.2077: 51.614b29–c5); and *Wudeng quanshu* 五燈全書 compiled by Jilun Chaoyong 霽崙超永 in 1697 (X.1571: 82.42b10–14). The case is popular in Western accounts of Zen, owing largely to D. T. Suzuki's discussion in his influential *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1926: 24). It is subsequently picked up by Alan Watts (1951: 126), Arthur Danto (1964: 579–580), Donovan Leitch (1967), Fritjof Capra (1975: 126), Abe Masao (1983: 56), Urs App (1994: 111–112), and Donald Lopez (2008: 227), among others. The term 親見知識 is polyvalent: it can be read, as translated here, as referencing a personal encounter with a teacher (reading 知識 as 善知識, i.e., a

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Virtually nothing is known about Qingyuan Weixin 青原惟信 (d.u.) other than his putative authorship of this "public case" (Chinese: *gong'an* 公案, Japanese: *kōan*),[2] which first appears in a Chan anthology dated to 1204.[3] But the anecdote is justly celebrated in both classical and modern sources, as it bears upon a problem that lies at the very heart of Buddhist path theory. The underlying conundrum, as we shall see, is that liberation is impossible, and yet it is achieved.

We will use Qingyuan Weixin's case, and the dialetheia to which it points, as our gateway into the nature and widespread usage of paradox in one of the most influential collections of Chan cases, the *Chanzong wumenguan* 禪宗無門關. Note that even the title of this delightful work is dialethic: sometimes translated as the *Gateless Barrier of the Chan Tradition*, it denotes a passageway through which there is no gate; this could mean either that it is impossible to enter, or alternatively, that there is nothing impeding one's entry.[4]

kalyāṇa-mitra or spiritual mentor). But it could also mean "to personally gain insight." The ambiguity may be intentional: to come "face to face" with a bona-fide Chan patriarch is a common metaphor for achieving Chan insight.

[2] The term *gong'an* originally referred to a record of a legal case that magistrates could reference as precedent for a legal judgment. The Chan master's verbal exchange with a disciple accordingly was likened to a magistrate's interrogation and judgment of a criminal suspect. For an account of how *gong'an* were used in the curricula of Song Dynasty Chan monasteries, see Sharf 2007. The analyses of some of the cases raised below borrows directly from that essay.

[3] Qingyuan Weixin's spiritual genealogy is recorded in the *Jiatai pudenglu zongmulu* 嘉泰普燈錄總目錄 (X.1558: 79.274b13). A reference to the anecdote (or perhaps an earlier version of it) appears in the *Yunmen kuangzhen chanshi guanglu* 雲門匡眞禪師廣錄, the record of Chan master Yunmen Wenyuan 雲門文偃 (862/864–949) compiled by Shoujian 守堅 and dated 1076 (T.1988: 47.547c11–15; App 1994: 252). However, the earliest extant version of Yunmen's record dates to 1267 (App 1994: xvii), and thus the attribution of the case to Yunmen is as uncertain as is the attribution to Qingyuan Weixin.

[4] This text, compiled by Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (1183–1260) and published in 1228, consists of forty-eight cases along with Wumen's comments in both prose and verse. Wumen culled the cases from a variety of earlier sources, primarily the recorded sayings texts (*yulu* 語錄) of renowned Chan masters. The title, like so many of the cases contained therein, contains a pun: in addition to the "gateless passageway," it could be read as "the passageway that is the word 'no' (or 'non-being')," a reading that is suggested in Wumen's commentary to the first case, Zhaozhou's "No." Or it could be read as referencing the author himself: "Wumen's Pass."

(As we have seen, the title of Chapter 9 of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, "The Dharma Gate of Non-duality," is a play on the same paradox: it is the entryway to the understanding that there is no understanding to attain and, thus, no entryway.)

At first glance, the "mountains are mountains" case is seemingly straightforward and the paradox only superficial. Virtually all modern commentators have availed themselves of the following interpretation: before setting out on the path, we unreflectively accept the common-sense attitude toward objects, such as mountains and rivers, as existing "out there" in the natural world. This is what phenomenologists, following Edmund Husserl, call the "natural attitude"—a viewpoint that unquestioningly accepts the existence of the world given to us by sense perception. As one engages in Buddhist practice, one comes to realize that the phenomenal world is a cognitive construct. Everything we know—everything that can be known—emerges as the result of causally determined, interdependent processes, and hence nothing can be said to exist in and of itself. In the language of Buddhist scholasticism, everything is causally conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) and hence lacks own-being or intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). There is, in the end, no substantially existent mountain out there in the mind-independent world, and this is what it means to characterize all things, including mountains, as empty (*śūnya*). At this stage, "mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers." But later still, as one matures in one's practice, one realizes that emptiness is also empty. In other words, to say that mountains are empty is to affirm that all there ever was or ever will be are conventionally existing mountains. The term "conventional" thus ceases to signify anything as there is no noumenal domain of truth that lies beyond appearances, and hence no intelligible distinction to be made between the phenomenal mountains that show up for us, and real ones. In the end, mountains are just mountains.

So when Qingyuan Weixin asks whether these three ways of understanding are the same or different, the answer seems straightforward: they are the same in some respects and different in others.

The mountains never change—they have always been empty—but the mind does. The mind evolves in its understanding, from an initial naïve perception of things as having independent existence, to the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena, and finally to the understanding that emptiness, too, is empty. Objectively, the world remains the same, but subjectively, the Chan adept has come to appreciate the ephemeral and insubstantial nature of the world and this brings freedom from clinging and desire.

To borrow the language of the *Heart Sutra*, first you see form as form, then you see form as empty, and finally you see that emptiness is precisely form. Or, in the imagery of Kuo'an Shiyuan's 廓庵師遠 (12th-century) *Ten Ox-herding Pictures* (*Shi niu tu* 十牛圖), as you progress along the path, you let go of the ox (the object of your search) and then let go of the seeker (the self) as well. This stage is famously represented by an empty circle (*yuan xiang* 圓相). But, according to the logic of Mahāyāna Buddhism, you cannot stop there. The final stage in Kuo'an Shiyuan's Ox-herding sequence is "returning to the marketplace with hands open" (*ruchan chuishou* 入鄽垂手), in which the *chan* adept is depicted as a fat-bellied bodhisattva strolling merrily through town. The seeker is back to where he began but now free of worldly cares and attachments.[5]

It is then possible to parameterize the apparent paradox in Qingyuan Weixin's case using the hermeneutic of two truths. From the perspective of conventional truth, there is a difference between the way the mountains are viewed at the beginning and end of the path, but from the perspective of ultimate truth there is not. The mountains remain the same (ultimate truth, the domain of ontology), but our apprehension of and/or relationship to

[5] There are many versions of the ox-herding pictures, dating back in China to at least the 11th century. The earliest versions, which consist of only five and six stages, depict the ox dissolving from black to white and do not include any "post-awakening" stages. Kuo'an Shiyuan's ten-stage sequence emerged as the most popular, and it may have been the first to depict the protagonist returning to the marketplace at the end of his quest. An edition and Japanese translation can be found in Kajitani et al. 1974: 98–143.

said mountains is transformed (conventional truth, the domain of epistemology).

There are respected scriptural precedents that could be used to support this reading. The *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*The Diamond-cutter Sūtra*), for example, makes repeated use of the apparently paradoxical formula "*x* is not *x* and therefore it is *x*," where *x* can stand for any existent thing or dharma.[6] Indian commentators explicitly invoke the two truths in their analyses of the *Vajracchedikā* formula: the first half—"*x* is not *x*"—pertains to the ultimate truth of emptiness, while the second—"therefore it is *x*"—pertains to the conventional (Tillemans 2009: 92). Commentators can then aver to Nāgārjuna's argument that it is precisely because all dharmas are empty of intrinsic being (ultimate truth, ontology) that they can enter into causal relations with other dharmas, thereby producing the ephemeral world that appears before us (conventional truth, epistemology). If one follows this line of argument, the paradox disappears.[7]

Or does it? The problem is that, were it that simple, Qingyuan Weixin's challenge would be vapid. Parameterizing the contradiction by distinguishing between "perspectives"—ultimate versus conventional, ontological versus epistemological—does not work, as the *gong'an* genre is, among other things, questioning the coherence of precisely these distinctions. We will see that the relationship between ultimate and conventional is itself enmeshed in paradox, and thus the two truths cannot help to defuse the dialetheia at the heart of this case: there is no difference between the mountains before and after awakening; thus, there is no path, no awakening, and no Chan; it is the understanding that there is no awakening and no Chan that constitutes Chan awakening; this awakening changes nothing and everything.

[6] In Buddhist scholasticism, dharmas are the irreducible atomic bits out of which the mental and physical world are created.

[7] For an alternative resolution of this paradox, based on an analysis of the syntax of the "signature formula," see Harrison 2006: 136–140; 2010: 241–245.

The Indic Background

The seeds of the "mountains are mountains" conundrum go back to the beginnings of Buddhist thought. Buddhism teaches that all conditioned existence (saṃsāra) is impermanent, that there is no eternal soul or self or godhead, and that the only genuine escape from suffering is the peace of nirvāṇa, which is the cessation of the five aggregates (*skandha*s) that constitute the person. Early Buddhist scriptures sometimes depict final nirvāṇa as tantamount to death, as death is now understood by secular materialists: there is no future rebirth, and hence sentient existence simply ceases. This led rival teachers to accuse the Buddhists of propagating nihilism. The Buddhists responded that their goal is not nihilistic; rather, the question as to whether there is something that survives final nirvāṇa is "undetermined" (*avyākṛta*, also translated as "unexpounded," "inscrutable").[8]

Various rationales can be found in Buddhist sources for declaring the issue undetermined, the details of which need not concern us here. However, irrespective of whether nirvāṇa is considered an absence pure and simple, or whether one imagines that something, however subtle and unimaginable, survives nirvāṇa, or whether one holds that the question is simply wrong-headed, all Buddhists agree that nirvāṇa is "unconditioned" (*asaṃskṛta*) and hence it cannot be the result of, or affected by, any cause. Some early Buddhist schools (Theravāda, Saṃmitīya, Vātsīputriyā) consider nirvāṇa to be the only unconditioned dharma, while other traditions, notably Sarvāstivāda, expand the list, sometimes by adding different types of "extinction" (*nirodha*), or including metaphysical or logical absences such as "space" (*ākāśa*; Bareau 1993). A pre-Einsteinian notion of space is a useful analogy for thinking

[8] See, for example, the *Sariputta-kotthita-sutta* (SN 44.6; iv.388) and *Anuradha-sutta* (SN 22.86; iii.1160). On the relationship between nirvāṇa and insentience, see Sharf 2014.

through the logic of the unconditioned: space exists, yet nothing touches or affects it.

The problem, then, is that activity (*karma*) of any kind, including Buddhist practice, cannot logically engender nirvāṇa. Anything one does, including trying not to do anything, can only be a cause for a subsequent effect, but nirvāṇa cannot be the effect of any cause. No activity can bring about the final cessation of all activity.

There are various ways in which the early scholastic tradition tried to respond, directly or indirectly, to this problem, none of which are particularly satisfying. The most familiar response was to simply caution against fretting about it: nirvāṇa, being unconditioned, lies beyond our (conditioned) comprehension, so just have faith that the Buddha's teachings will lead one there. This strategy finds scriptural warrant in a famous parable from the *Cūḷa-Māluṅkya-sutta*, in which a man is shot by a poison arrow and a surgeon is called to extract it. What if, before allowing the surgeon to remove the arrow, the man were to insist on first knowing the identity of the person who shot the arrow (his caste, name, clan, village, complexion, etc.), the nature of the bow and arrow that were used (the materials and design of the bow, the species of bird from which the arrow feathers came, etc.), and so on? Surely, this benighted fellow would die from the poison before the surgeon could get on with his work.[9] The Buddha's teachings are simply a means to an end—a raft to cross the river of saṃsāra. Or, in an image popular in East Asia, the Buddha's teachings are likened to a finger pointing to the moon; understanding entails looking not at the finger but at the moon to which it points. It is counterproductive to ponder inconsistencies and contradictions in the teachings, since the teachings are, in the end, mere expedient devices (*upāya*) leading the way to a goal that transcends conceptual understanding.

One indication that Buddhist exegetes themselves found this solution inadequate is that they continued to wrestle with it, reworking

[9] *Majjhima-nikāya* 63, i. 426.

their doctrinal formulations and interpretative strategies. The Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), for example, holds that all dharmas are devoid of intrinsic being, rendering the distinction between conditioned things and unconditioned things moot. If the nature of *everything* is empty, then there is ultimately no distinction between conditioned saṃsāra and unconditioned nirvāṇa, and hence there is nothing to attain. This claim is made repeatedly and forcefully in the early Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) literature, as well as in Madhyamaka exegetical materials such as the MMK.

The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* uses the language of non-duality, insisting that there is no difference between ignorance and awakening, impurity and purity. And Tathāgatagarbha (Matrix of Buddhahood) texts declare that since buddhahood—the unconditioned—cannot be attained, it must already be present within all beings; therefore, nirvāṇa is not so much achieved as it is disclosed. While there are significant differences in the way these doctrines are fleshed out, they all address the seemingly insuperable gap between the mundane and supramundane (conditioned and unconditioned, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa) by maintaining that there is ultimately no gap to be bridged.

However, these important strands of Mahāyāna thought solved one problem only to generate others. If everything is empty, if buddhahood already abides within, what stands in the way of our recognizing this? If there is ultimately nothing to achieve, why practice in the first place? And finally, if *everything* is empty, doesn't this apply to the teachings of the Buddha as well?

These questions motivate the formulation of the two truths found in Chapter 24 of Nāgārjuna's MMK. In the first twenty-three chapters, Nāgārjuna is intent on showing that nothing has any intrinsic or substantial nature. Chapter 24 opens with the interlocutor raising the question: if it is indeed the case that nothing exists in-and-of-itself—that everything is empty—then can't the same be said of the Buddhist teachings? Aren't they empty, too?

If all of this is empty, neither arising nor ceasing,
Then for you, it follows that the Four Noble Truths do not exist.
If the Four Noble Truths do not exist, then knowledge,
abandonment,
Meditation and manifestation will be completely impossible.[10]

In other words, in the interlocutor's mind, the Buddha's teachings—the four noble truths, the stages of liberation, the three jewels (Buddha, dharma, and *saṃgha*)—should be subject to the same critique that Nāgārjuna applies to everything else.

Nāgārjuna begins his response by insisting that the interlocutor confuses emptiness with nonexistence: "We say that this understanding of yours, of emptiness and the purpose of emptiness, and of the significance of emptiness is incorrect. As a consequence you are harmed by it."[11] According to Nāgārjuna, to claim that something is empty is *not* tantamount to claiming that it is false. He then goes on, famously, to proffer the two truths:

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths:
A truth of worldly convention, and an ultimate truth.
Those who do not understand the distinction drawn between
these two truths
Do not understand the Buddha's profound truth.
Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
liberation is not achieved.[12]

[10] *Yadi śūnyam idaṃ sarvam udayo nāsti na vyayaḥ | caturṇām āryasatyānām abhāvas te prasajyate* (24.1–2; trans. Garfield 1995: 67).

[11] *Atra brūmaḥ śūnyatāyāṃ na tvaṃ vetsi prayojanam | śūnyatāṃ śūnyatārthaṃ ca tata evaṃ vihanyase* (24.7; trans. Garfield 1995: 68).

[12] *Dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā | lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ || ye 'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayor dvayoḥ | te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīre buddhaśāsane || vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate | paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate* (24.8, 10; trans. Garfield 1995: 68).

In other words, the conventional way of using language—the language associated with the "natural attitude" that unreflectively accepts things as they appear—is required to convey ultimate truth, the truth of emptiness. For Nāgārjuna, emptiness is precisely dependent origination; as there is nothing that is not dependently originated, there is nothing that exists in-and-of-itself, and this is what it means to say that things are empty.

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way.
> Something that is not dependently arisen, such a thing does not exist.
> Therefore a nonempty thing does not exist.[13]

Much of the remainder of Chapter 24 is taken up with the argument that the Buddha's teachings, and indeed the path itself, only make sense in the context of emptiness. The truths of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, for example, all presume a world in a state of constant flux and the Buddhist path can lead to the cessation of ignorance, suffering, and saṃsāra only insofar as things lack *svabhāva* or intrinsic nature. To assert that all things are empty is not, then, to claim that things are false or inexistent, but rather to claim that they exist co-dependently.

The problem with this response is that it is edifying only to the extent that one exempts the doctrine of dependent origination from the logical thrust of Nāgārjuna's dialectic. To put this another way, how does the claim that all things are dependently originated fit within the rubric of the two truths? Is dependent origination itself conventionally true or ultimately true?

[13] *Yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe | sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā || apratītya samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate | yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate* (24.18–19; trans. Garfield 1995: 69).

This is not a trivial issue. The two-truths doctrine holds that the teachings of the Buddha—the four noble truths, three jewels, and so on—are conventionally *true* because they are commensurate with, and indeed lead to, the ultimate truth of emptiness. This is what distinguishes them from the conventional *falsehoods* taught by heterodox non-Buddhist teachers. But the ultimate truth to which conventional truth points turns out to be the truth that anything one says about the world must pertain to the domain of the conventional. We are now up against the limits-of-thought paradox: the doctrine of two truths cannot be asserted ultimately, since the ultimate does not brook conceptual distinctions. (Properly speaking, the ultimate cannot be a "truth claim" or a "perspective" or a "view" at all, as that would entail being one among many.)

It would then seem that the two-truths doctrine itself must belong to the domain of the conventional. Indeed, the whole point of Nāgārjuna's reductio ad absurdum arguments is to demonstrate that *nothing* can be asserted ultimately, including the claim that nothing can be asserted ultimately. This leaves conventional truth as the only truth left standing, in which case the conventional truth that there is no ultimate truth is as true as it gets. We have, in other words, a reiteration of the "signature formula" from the *Vajracchedikā:* x is not x and therefore it is x. (The ultimate is not ultimate, and therefore it is ultimate.) But now we cannot use the two truths as a conceptual tool to parameterize our way out of the contradiction, since the two truths are themselves contradictory. Rather than resolving the paradox, applying the two truths merely relocates it.

In sum, Nāgārjuna proffers the two truths as a means to situate the Buddha's teachings within his understanding of emptiness and dependent origination. He draws a distinction between conventional and ultimate—between finger and moon—and then claims that the Buddha's teachings are provisionally *true* by virtue of the fact that they point to the ultimate. But if ultimate truth is the truth that all truth is dependent, we are left with no stable point of reference—no non-conventional foundation—on the basis of

which we might distinguish between the conventional truth of the Buddha's teaching and the teachings of his rivals. The claim that the truth of any statement is context dependent and hence only relatively true must apply to the statement that all statements are context dependent and only relatively true. The two truths turn out to be paradoxical, and thus to use the two truths to tame the paradox in Qingyuan Weixin's case simply kicks the can down the road.

There has been some debate of late about whether Nāgārjuna himself explicitly endorsed the use of paradox in his writings.[14] What is clear, however, is that later Madhyamaka commentators in India and Tibet did everything they could to avoid it, lest they be accused of countenancing contradiction and thus incoherence. Yogācāra exegetes were unconvinced by Madhyamaka efforts to avoid paradox, and they used the contradiction in Nāgārjuna's formulation of the two truths as fodder for their critique (Yao 2014). But China was a different story: Chinese Buddhist commentators, steeped in the paradoxes of Zhuangzi and Laozi, not only recognized the limits-of-thought paradox in the two-truth formulation, but ran with it.

The Gateless Gate

As we saw in the last chapter, the architects of Sanlun and Tiantai thought could be viewed as responding to the logical conundrum created by the two truths. Tiantai exegetes, for example, citing dubious scriptural authorities, read Chapter 24 of the MMK as proffering not two truths but three, adding a "middle truth" that straddles or sublates conventional truth and ultimate truth.[15] Some

[14] See, for example, Garfield and Priest 2003; Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008; Tillemans 2009, 2013; Siderits 2013; and Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2013a, 2013b.

[15] Zhiyi repeatedly cites the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 (T.245, T.246) and *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 (T.1485) as scriptural warrants for his doctrine of three truths. But both texts are clearly Chinese apocrypha: they were composed in China, probably in the 5th century, but disguised to look as if they were translations of Sanskrit originals. On the origins of the Tiantai doctrine of three truths, see Swanson 1989: 38–56.

would see this as a philosophical advance, as it allowed Tiantai exegetes to distinguish conventional wisdom (the middle truth) from mere conventional falsehood, and thus provided a foundation for ethical thought and action (Ziporyn 2000). The Chan tradition, however, steadfastly refused to move in this direction. From their point of view, proliferating truths simply exacerbates the muddle. In what may have been a thinly veiled attack on the nascent Tiantai tradition, one of the founders of Southern Chan, Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (670–762), said:

> There is only the middle way, and it too is not in the middle, since the meaning of "middle way" is predicated on the basis of the extremes. It is the same with three fingers—it is only by virtue of the two fingers on either side that we can posit a finger in the middle. If there are no sides, there is also no middle finger.[16]

Shenhui is claiming that the conventional and ultimate are themselves co-dependent—that the label "conventional" is meaningful only in relation to the label "ultimate," and vice versa. Being relational and hence empty, the two truths cannot be construed as independent positions or perspectives between which one might locate a middle. That Shenhui's polemics fail to do justice to the conceptual sophistication of the Tiantai position need not concern us here. Our point is simply that the Chan tradition refuses to mitigate or resolve the contradiction that lies at the heart of the two-truth doctrine (that is: is the doctrine itself conventional or ultimate?). Rather, they embrace it. And this means rejecting any

[16] 唯有中道亦不在其中。中道義因邊而立。猶如三指並同。要因兩邊始立中指。若無兩邊中指亦無 (*Nanyang heshang dunjiao jietuo chanmen zhiliaoxing tanyu* 南陽和上頓教解脫禪門直了性壇語, Pelliot no. 2045; Hu Shi 1968: 248; Tōdai goroku kenkyū han 2006: 117).

attempt at mediation—any attempt to circumscribe a third position that resolves or transcends the antinomy.

One possible mediating stance might be the stance of silence, in which one refrains from speech altogether so as to avoid positing any view, perspective, or truth. Some *gong'an* do in fact depict Chan masters, like the Greek philosopher Cratylus or the Buddhist sage Vimalakīrti, resorting to non-verbal gestures. In response to their students' challenges to say something "real" or "true" (i.e., something not conventional or relative), Huangbo Xiyuan 黄檗希運 (d. ca. 850) was famous for hitting the interlocutor, Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866–867) for letting out a shout, and Juzhi 俱胝 (d.u.) for simply raising one finger. Yet should their disciples mistake these actions as pointing toward some inexpressible truth—as fingers pointing to the moon—they are immediately chastised. Take, for example, Case 3 from the *Wumenguan*.

> Whenever someone challenged Juzhi with a question, he would simply hold up one finger. Later an acolyte was asked by someone outside [the monastery], "What is the master's essential teaching?" The acolyte also held up his finger. When Juzhi heard about this, he took out a knife and cut off the acolyte's finger. The acolyte cried out in pain and ran out, but Juzhi called him back. When the acolyte turned his head, Juzhi raised his finger. The acolyte suddenly understood.[17]

The acolyte's transgression, of course, was mistaking the finger for the moon, which is why the master cuts it off. But an absent finger (the refusal to signify, the posture of silence) is just as contextually

[17] 俱胝和尚凡有詰問，唯舉一指。後有童子，因外人問：和尚說何法要？童子亦豎指頭。胝聞，遂以刀斷其指。童子負痛號哭而去。胝復召之。童子迴首。胝卻豎起指。童子忽然領悟 (T.2005: 48.293b11–16; cf. *Biyan lu* 碧巖録 case no. 19).

dependent as is the shout, the strike, the wordless finger, or any other attempt at resolving the dilemma. Which is why the case ends with the master once again raising his finger. There is no escape.[18]

This same point is driven home in Case 6 of the *Wumenguan*, in which Śākyamuni Buddha, instead of preaching a sermon, silently holds up a flower. The elder Mahākāśyapa alone smiles, indicating his understanding, and the Buddha responds by acknowledging his transmission to the elder. But instead of celebrating the Buddha's skillful teaching, in his commentary the author of the *Wumenguan* castigates the Buddha as a swindler who offers his audience dog's meat and calls it mutton. "What if everyone smiled?" Wumen asks. To whom, then, would the Buddha have transmitted the dharma?[19] Silence is no less conventional, no more direct, than any other signifier, a point driven home in Hakuin Ekaku's 白隱慧鶴 (1686–1769) famous *kōan*, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

The attempt to circumscribe a third medial position (or "non-position") that tames or resolves the paradox, that signifies by refusing to signify that which can't be signified, whether through mute gesture or knowing silence, is rejected as futile and misguided. Rather than trying to insulate the tradition from the force of its own deconstructive dialectic, Chan holds back nothing. Wumen calls the Buddha a swindler, the sixth-patriarch Huineng is depicted tearing up the sacred scriptures,[20] Yunmen likens the Buddha to a "dry shit-stick" (*ganshijue* 乾屎橛),[21] and Linji famously declares, "If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha" (*feng fo sha fo* 逢佛殺佛).[22] There is no special pleading here—no special dispensation for expedient teachings.

[18] Note the parallel to Zhuangzi's argument, discussed in Chapter 2 earlier, that we cannot escape our discursive space.

[19] T.2005: 48.293c17–21.

[20] The attribution of this painting (now in a private Japanese collection) to the celebrated painter Liang Kai 梁楷 (ca. 1140–1210) is controversial, but the theme is clear enough.

[21] That is, toilet paper; see Case 21 of the *Wumenguan*, T.2005: 48.295c5–11.

[22] Wumen quotes this popular line in his commentary to Case 1 of the *Wumenguan*, T.2005: 48.293a8–9.

It would seem then that transmission of the dharma is impossible—that speech and silence both fail. And yet in saying this, I have transmitted the truth of the matter. This paradox, at the heart of so many Chan cases, is drolly illustrated in *Wumenguan* Case 5, Xiangyan's 香嚴 (d. 898) "Man up in a Tree."

> Master Xiangyan said, "It is like a man in a tree, hanging from a branch by his teeth, with his hands unable to reach a branch, his legs unable to reach the trunk. Under the tree is a man who asks why [Bodhidharma] came from the West. If the man [in the tree] fails to reply, he shirks what is being asked of him. If he responds, he loses life and limb. In this situation, how would you respond?"
>
> Wumen comments: Even should your eloquence flow like a waterfall, it is of no use. Even should you preach the teachings of all the scriptures, it is still of no use. Should you find a response to this problem, you will bring life to a path that had previously been dead, and kill the path that had previously been alive. Otherwise, you must wait for the coming of Maitreya and ask him.[23]

To appreciate this case, the reader has to know what any literate Chan monk would know, namely, that the Indian patriarch Bodhidharma traveled to China in order to transmit the dharma. But the moment the man in the tree opens his mouth to respond in this or any other fashion, he falls to his death. The man under the tree is asking for the moon—the true dharma that Bodhidharma brought to China—but to respond in any fashion at all is to offer a mere finger. Xiangyan is saying that transmission of the dharma—the moon—is impossible, since all we have are empty fingers. But this very truth *is* the moon, and hence the case succeeds in

[23] 香嚴和尚云：如人上樹。口啣樹枝，手不攀枝，脚不踏樹。樹下有人，問西來意。不對即違他所問。若對又喪身失命。正恁麽時，作麽生對？無門曰：縱有懸河之辨，總用不著。説得一大藏教，亦用不著。若向者裏對得著，活却從前死路頭，死却從前活路頭。其或未然，直待當來問彌勒 (T.2005: 48.293c2–8).

transmitting the dharma. This is why Bodhidharma came to the West.

Bodhidharma's transmission of the dharma to his one-and-only Chinese successor Huike 慧可 (d.u.) is itself the subject of Case 41 of the *Wumenguan*.[24] This famous (but no doubt apocryphal) anecdote begins with Huike waiting patiently outside Bodhidharma's cave for days on end, hoping to catch the master's attention, while the falling snow piles up around him. Finally, in an act of desperation, Huike cuts off his arm, presents it to Bodhidharma, and says,

> "Your disciple's mind is not at peace. I beg the master to put my mind at peace."
>
> Bodhidharma said: "Give me your mind and I'll put it at peace."
>
> [Huike] said: "I have searched for my mind, but in the end am unable to get hold of it."
>
> Bodhidharma said: "I have put your mind at peace for you."[25]

In this paradigmatic Chan encounter dialogue, Bodhidharma pacifies Huike's mind by showing him that there is no mind to pacify. Huike gets it, and becomes the second patriarch in China.

The temptation at this point might be to resort, once again, to a distinction between conventional and ultimate, or between epistemology and ontology. There must, in the final analysis, be *some* difference, however "conventional," between those who understand that there is ultimately nothing to attain, and those who have not yet come to this understanding. There must be *some* difference between Huike before the transmission, and Huike after the transmission, even if, from the ultimate or ontological perspective, the point

[24] This exchange, which marks the beginning of the transmission of the dharma in China, served as the prototype for all meetings between master and disciple in Chan monastic training; an image of Bodhidharma was placed outside the master's chamber when the senior disciples came for a formal interview known as "entering the chambers" (*rushi* 入室; Foulk and Sharf 1993: 194).

[25] 弟子心未安；乞師安心。磨云：將心來，與汝安。祖云：覓心了不可得。磨云：為汝安心竟 (T.2005: 48.298a16–18).

of the story is that there is no mind in need of enlightenment, and thus no enlightenment to be gained. What could be more central to Buddhism in general and Chan in particular than the notion that practice leads to, or discloses, wisdom—the buddha mind—and that this wisdom is transformative.

Yet the moment one asserts these venerable Buddhist truths—the moment one claims that there must be *something* gained through practice (whether ultimately or conventionally), Wumen will respond that nothing is attained (either ultimately or conventionally). Case 11, for example, takes aim at the premise that there are some grounds on which to distinguish the awakened from the unawakened.

> Zhaozhou came upon a hermit and asked, "Have you got it? Have you got it?" The hermit held up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "The water is too shallow to anchor a boat here." He then went on his way.
>
> He then came upon another hermit and asked, "Have you got it? Have you got it?" This hermit also held up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "Able to give. Able to take. Able to kill. Able to save." He then bowed to him.
>
> Wumen comments: They both held up their fists in the same way, so why did he affirm one but not the other? Tell me, what is the problem here? If you can give a single turning word to clarify this, you will see that Zhaozhou's tongue has no bone in it, now helping others up, now knocking them down, with great freedom. Be that as it may, Zhaozhou was himself thoroughly examined by the two hermits. If you say there is a difference in attainment between the two hermits, you do not yet have the eye of practice. If you say there is no difference in attainment, you also do not yet have the eye of practice.[26]

[26] 趙州到一庵主處問：有麼有麼？主豎起拳頭。州云：水淺，不是泊舡處，便行。又到一庵主處云：有麼有麼？主亦豎起拳頭。州云：能縱能奪能殺能活，便作禮。無門曰：一般豎起拳頭。為甚麼肯一

This case is a clever trap into which you fall if you believe there is something *behind* Zhaozhou's approval of one hermit and his disapproval of the other. Wumen declares that Zhaozhou's choice is arbitrary; he says Zhaozhou's "tongue has no bone in it," and that he raises one and disparages the other with "great freedom" (*da zizai* 大自在)—a term that references the unconstrained and unconditioned activities of a buddha. Zhaozhou is thus free from any investment in, or attachment to, attainment or non-attainment. But to claim that there is no difference between attainment and non-attainment is to establish a medial position, and this is precisely what Zhaozhou does *not* do. Rather he mischievously denigrates one hermit and acknowledges the other, thereby enacting his freedom from positions in the very act of "testing" the hermits.[27] Which is not to say that Zhaozhou has something the hermits lack—that is, "freedom." Note how Wumen flips things around, stating that the two hermits saw through Zhaozhou's ruse and were actually the ones doing the testing. Who now has it and who does not?

The same point is made in an almost identical manner in Case 26 in the *Wumenguan*, "Two Monks Roll up the Blinds."

> When the monks assembled before the meal for his lecture, Great Master Fayan of Qingliang Monastery[28] pointed at the blinds. Thereupon two monks went together and rolled up the blinds. Fayan said, "One has it, and the other lost it."
>
> Wumen comments: Tell me, who has it and who lost it? If you have the singular eye into this, you will understand where the

箇不肯一箇。且道，誦訛在甚處。若向者裏，下得一轉語，便見趙州舌頭無骨，扶起放倒得大自在。雖然如是，爭奈趙州卻被二庵主勘破。若道二庵主有優劣，未具參學眼。若道無優劣，亦未具參學眼 (T.2005: 48.294b5–14; translation borrows from Sekida 1977: 51).

[27] On the notion of "enacting" or "performing" buddhahood, see Sharf 2005.
[28] Fayan Wenyi 法眼文益, 885–958.

> National Teacher Qingliang failed. However, avoid any judgment of having or losing.[29]

As with Zhaozhou, Fayan acknowledges the attainment of one anonymous monk and denies it to another, without any apparent criteria to guide him. Should you be tempted to try to deduce what lies *behind* Fayan's pronouncement—what is concealed beneath or beyond the surface—you are immediately lost. There is only surface, only the conventional, only fingers. And to drive the point home, in his commentary Wumen once again reverses the hierarchy between master and disciple, between the awakened and the unawakened, by suggesting that it is actually Great Fayan who is at fault here.

As we have seen, many of Wumen's cases are rather cryptic, leaving it to the reader to tease out the paradox at the core of the anecdote. But Case 2 of the *Wumenguan*, Baizhang Huaihai's 百丈懷海 (749–814) "Wild Fox," foregrounds the paradox for all to see. This case is particularly salient for our discussion, as it deals directly with the problem of liberation—with whether final escape from karmic conditioning and rebirth is possible at all.

> Whenever Baizhang delivered a sermon, an old man always followed the assembly in order to listen to the teaching. When the assembly left, the old man left, too. Unexpectedly, one day he remained behind. The Master asked him, "Who are you, standing in front of me?" The old man replied, "Indeed, I am not a human being. In the past, in the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, I lived on this mountain [as a Chan teacher]. On one occasion a student asked me, 'Is a person of great accomplishment still subject to cause and effect or not?' I answered, 'He is not.' [Because of my answer] I was

[29] 清涼大法眼，因僧齋前上參。眼以手指簾。時有二僧，同去卷簾。眼曰：一得一失。無門曰：且道是誰得誰失。若向者裏著得一隻眼，便知清涼國師敗闕處。然雖如是，切忌向得失裏商量 (T.2005: 48.296b1–6).

> reborn as a fox for five hundred lifetimes. I now ask you Master to say a transformative word on my behalf to free me from this fox body." He then asked, "Is a person of great accomplishment still subject to cause and effect or not?" The master answered, "He cannot evade cause and effect." Upon hearing these words the old man immediately understood. Making a bow he said, "I have now been released from the fox, whose body remains behind the mountain. I have presumed to tell this to you, and now request that you perform a funeral for me as you would for a deceased monk." . . .
>
> That evening [after performing the funeral for the fox] the Master convened an assembly and related the circumstances [of the funeral]. Huangbo then asked, "The old man, failing to respond correctly, was reborn as a fox for five-hundred lifetimes. Suppose that time after time he made no mistake; what would have happened then?" The master said, "Come closer and I'll tell you." Huangbo approached [Baizhang] and gave the master a slap. The master clapped his hands and laughed saying, "I had supposed that the barbarian had a red beard, and now here is a red-bearded barbarian!"[30]

Buddhist doctrine holds that Buddhist practice leads to nirvāṇa—to freedom from causation, and to escape from the karmically determined cycle of life and death. Hence the orthodox response to the initial question would seem to be that the person of great accomplishment—an awakened sage—is indeed free of causation. Yet precisely because he gave this doctrinally sanctioned

[30] 百丈和尚凡參次，有一老人，常隨衆聽法。衆人退，老人亦退。忽一日不退。師遂問：面前立者復是何人？老人云：諾，某甲非人也。於過去迦葉佛時，曾住此山。因學人問：大修行底人，還落因果也無？某甲對云：不落因果。五百生墮野狐身。今請和尚代一轉語，－貴脫野狐。遂問：大修行底人，還落因果也無？師云：不昧因果。老人於言下大悟。作禮云：某甲已脫野狐身住在山後。敢告和尚，乞依亡僧事例。。。。師至晚上堂，擧前因緣。黃蘗便問：古人錯祇對一轉語，墮五百生野狐身。轉轉不錯，合作箇甚麼？師云：近前來，與伊道。黃蘗遂近前。與師一掌。師拍手笑云：將謂胡鬚赤；更有赤鬚胡 (T.2005: 48.293a15–b3). This *gong'an* also appears as case 8 in the *Congrong lu* 從容録.

response, the old man found himself bound to the cycle of life and death. The challenge, then, is to respond in a manner that does not reify causation or liberation—that does not confuse the conventional with the ultimate—and at the same time does not posit a medial or transcendent position (i.e., a perspective from which you neither affirm nor deny causation and liberation). Baizhang responds by asserting the inverse of the old man's response, saying that even an awakened person cannot escape causation. (Zhaozhou uses precisely the same strategy in Case 1 of *Wumenguan*, in which he categorically denies that dogs have buddha-nature.)[31] Baizhang's claim that there is no escape from karma is tantamount to declaring that there is no final nirvāṇa, no buddhahood, no end to life and death, no freedom. And this answer—the assertion that there is no freedom—is what frees the old man. The paradoxical structure could not be more explicit: if you claim liberation is possible, it is not. If you claim it is not possible, it is.

At the end of the story, after Baizhang relates this improbable tale to his assembly, his leading disciple Huangbo confronts the master with a counter challenge: what would have happened had the old abbot given the answer that liberated him in the first place—had he responded with the doctrinally "incorrect" answer that there is no escape from karma? After all, it would seem that the answer that freed the fox—that no liberation is possible—is only effective insofar as it is the antithesis of the answer previously given, namely, that liberation is in fact possible.

Huangbo is raising the specter of radical contingency—that there is, in the end, no determinate truth of the matter, and thus, ultimately, both answers are equally true and equally false.[32] In response to this challenge, the master invites Huangbo to approach

[31] For an extended analysis of "Zhaozhou's dog," see Sharf 2007.

[32] Such a position is sanctioned, arguably, in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, which claims that the Buddha teaches non-self to those who hold to the existence of a self. For those who cling to non-self, he teaches the existence of a self (*Dabanniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T.374: 12.407b29–c19, et passim).

the dais. Those versed in Chan literature know what to expect next: the master will strike the student, as a means of bringing closure to the exchange if not to the conceptual loop. But in yet another reversal, Huangbo manages to get his strike in first. Baizhang, delighted, offers Huangbo the ultimate compliment, using a pun to associate him with both the wily fox of the story and with Bodhidharma, two inveterate tricksters.[33] The way out of the loop is to understand that there is no way out. The task of the Chan master is simply to drill this home.

Closure (and Not)

Wumen understands that there is no ultimate position, or perspective, or point of view, since ultimate truth can only be the truth that all truth is context dependent. Again and again, following impeccable Mahāyāna scriptural precedents, Wumen asserts the identity of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, of wisdom and ignorance, of freedom and entrapment. He does this not from the perspective or standpoint of the ultimate, since there is no ultimate "perspective" to be had. This is precisely Wumen's point: his cases are traps, intended to catch the unwary student who imagines some transcendent ground beyond the vagaries of contingency and conception—a final escape from life and death. There is no stepping outside oneself, no view from nowhere, no escape from causality. This is the truth of emptiness, *the realization of which frees one from causality*. Rather than running away from this dialethia, Wumen runs toward it.

Wumen refuses to hold anything sacred. He does not distinguish between the truths of Chan and the mundane truths of everyday

[33] In medieval times, as in modern Mandarin, the Chinese characters for "barbarian" 胡 and "fox" 狐 were homophones (Pulleyblank 1991: 126 and 127; in modern Mandarin both are pronounced *hú*).

life. No special dispensation is made for Chan skillful means. Chan is nothing special. And this, of course, is what makes it special.

Wumen thus endorses, and indeed revels in, a number of related dialethias, some of which we have already visited earlier in this book. Liberation is impossible to achieve and yet it is achieved. Transmitting the dharma is impossible and yet it happens. Nirvāṇa and saṃsāra—ultimate and conventional—are identical and yet different. The truth cannot be spoken, and yet it is spoken. Indeed, it is difficult to find a single case in Wumen's revered collection that isn't constructed around a paradox that is held to be both true and pressing.

To return to where we began, Qingyuan Weixin's asks if the three views of the mountains—those at the beginning, middle, and end of one's practice—are the same or different. It should now be clear that Qingyuan Weixin, like Wumen, does not want to avoid the dialetheia, but rather wants to rub one's nose in it. To assert that they are different *in any respect*—to maintain that there is anything to attain, either conventionally or ultimately—is to fall from the path. But at the same time there must be a difference; if awakening were not an achievement, there would be no path from which to fall. There is nothing to be attained, and when you see this, you have attained something, both conventionally and ultimately. Everything is left precisely as it was before, and everything has changed, both conventionally and ultimately.

If what one attains is the understanding that there is nothing to attain, if Chan is nothing special, why, one might ask, should one practice Chan in the first place? This is the subject of *Wumenguan* Case 16: "Yunmen said, 'How vast and wide is the world! Why put on the seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?' "[34] In other words, of all the possible things one might do with one's life, why choose

[34] 雲門曰：世界恁麼廣闊。因甚向鐘聲裏披七條 (T.2005: 48.295a12–13); the case also appears in Yunmen's record: 上堂因聞鐘鳴。乃云：世界與麼廣闊。爲什麼鐘聲披七條 (T.1988: 47.553a1–2; App 1994: 152–153).

the ritually regimented life of a monk? Yunmen provides no rationale since, in the end, there is no rationale to give. There is no non-empty moon by which to determine that one finger is better than another.

Yunmen puts on his robe because the bell has sounded.

6

Dining on Painted Rice Cakes

Dōgen's Use of Paradox and Contradiction

Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest

Introduction

Our next witness in prosecuting the case for the acceptance of dialetheias in East Asian philosophy is Dōgen Kigen 道元希玄 (1200–1253), founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen Buddhism.

Dōgen's writings are highly intertextual—they engage, often critically, with a great array of Buddhist scriptural and exegetical materials, as well as with the writings of many famous Zen masters who went before him. His works are also layered, allusive, highly literary, and often quite polemical. They hence pose many difficulties for translators and interpreters. Nonetheless, there are passages in his writings in which it is pretty clear what he is up to. And his texts repay close study. Sometimes that close study reveals an explicit commitment to paradox, not as a kind of *upāya* to bring one up short, but, just as they are used by his Tiantai predecessors, as a way of saying how reality must be. Here we consider a few such passages from *Shōbōgenzō*.

Dōgen's formulation of Zen draws heavily on Chinese Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Huayan. Dōgen sees illuminating contradictions emerging from those traditions, accepts them, and weaves them into a deliberately inconsistent account of reality and of human experience. He also weaves ontological and phenomenological ideas together, treating the world as *the world we experience*.

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These methodological strands are as intertwined as his tangled vines, to which we will come.

Shōji

We begin with two short passages from *Shōji* (*Birth and Death*).

> "Since there's a buddha within birth and death, there's no birth and death." It is also said, "Since there isn't a buddha within birth and death, we aren't deluded by birth and death."[1]

> Just understanding that birth and death is itself nirvāṇa, one should neither despise birth and death nor seek after nirvāṇa. Only then will one be in a position to get free from birth and death.[2]

The term "birth and death" is a standard Chinese translation of the Sanskrit *saṃsāra*, and a metonym for *arising* and *ceasing*, and hence the phrase denotes the conventional world of dependent origination. These passages refer obliquely to the *Prajñāparamitā* sūtras, and in particular the *Vajraccedikā sūtra*. But they also echo chapter 22 of Nāgārjuna's MMK, in which we find the claims that the Buddha, after attaining awakening, neither exists nor does not exist (22.14), and that whatever is true of the Buddha is true of all sentient beings (22.16). They also allude to the identity of emptiness and dependent origination,

[1] 生死の中に佛あれば生死なし。又云く、生死の中に佛なければ生死にまどはず (Mizuno 2009b: 199). Unless otherwise noted, translations from Dōgen in this chapter are from the Sōtō Zen Text Project (forthcoming). Thanks to Carl Bielefeldt, Chief Editor of the project, and the Sōtōshū Shūmūchō for making this translation available to us.

[2] ただ生死すなはち涅槃とこころえて、生死としていとふべきもなく、涅槃としてねがふべきもなし。このときはじめて生死をはなるる分あり。生より死にうつると心うるは、これあやまりなり (Mizuno 2009b: 199–200).

and of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, claims we find in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in 8,000 lines*) and in MMK, both at 24.18, where dependent origination and emptiness are identified, and at 25.20, where Nāgārjuna asserts that there is no difference at all between nirvāṇa and saṃsāra. Given the Madhyamaka contribution to Zen thought, it is not surprising that Dōgen inherits the paradoxes we find both in the *Prajñāparamitā* and Nāgārjuna.

In these brief passages, Dōgen introduces several sets of contradictory claims. First, the Buddha both is and is not in birth and death. This commitment to a truth-value glut regarding the Buddha's presence in saṃsāra actually *contrasts* with Nāgārjuna's commitment to a gap in the region of logical space. Nāgārjuna warns us against saying anything about the Buddha after nirvāṇa, on pain of reification or treating the ultimate as expressible.[3]

Dōgen takes a slightly different angle, asking whether the Buddha does or does not live in the realm of the conventionally real. He does. For everything, even emptiness is only conventionally real; that is what it is to be empty. He also does not. He is fully awakened, and so inhabits a world of emptiness in which there are no entities that arise and cease. The fact that he both is and is not in nirvāṇa, and both is and is not in saṃsāra, reflects the paradoxical identity of these two realms, as well as the paradoxical nature of awakened experience.

This also means that the realm of conventional reality—of birth and death—both exists and does not exist. Because it is the only place awakening can arise, and because it is that which is empty, birth and death must exist. But because when it is correctly understood or seen from the standpoint of full awakening it is seen to be illusory, there is no world of birth and death. We are bound by life in

[3] Of course, in doing so, he himself falls into the paradox of expressibility we explored earlier in the context of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, a paradox we saw also arises in the *Daodejing*. Dōgen would have been familiar with both texts.

birth and death and therefore it is real; it is the condition of our existence. But freedom from birth and death consists not in *escaping* that bondage, but rather in realizing the illusory character of the bonds. Liberation consists in the recognition that we are already liberated, and because there is no bondage, there is no liberation.

The contradictions at issue here are repeated by Dōgen in other places. Thus, in *Genjōkōan* (*The Issue at Hand*) we find the following:

> At times when the dharmas are the buddha dharma, just then there are delusion and awakening, there is practice, there is birth, there is death, there are buddhas, there are living beings. At times when all the myriad dharmas are not self, there is no delusion, there is no awakening, there are no buddhas, there are no living beings, there is no arising, there is no cessation.[4]

Conventionally, delusion, realization, and the rest of saṃsāra are perfectly real; ultimately, they are unreal. But, given Dōgen's insistence on the complete, literal identity of the two truths, he has no interest in parameterizing away the apparent contradiction. Instead, he must endorse it. Buddhas and sentient beings are both real and unreal, and in exactly the same sense.

Dōgen is aware of these paradoxes, aware of their origin in Indian Mahāyāna literature, and does nothing either to avoid or to defuse them. Instead, he emphasizes the paradoxical phenomenological and soteriological consequences of Nāgārjuna's formulation. Nāgārjuna saw the two truths as engendering the contradictory nature of reality, and Dōgen understands this to mean that both ordinary and awakened consciousness are contradictory as well. Whether we are ordinary sentient beings or awakened Buddhas, we

[4] 諸法の仏法なる時節、すなはち迷悟あり、修行あり、生あり死あり、諸佛あり、衆生あり。万法ともにわれにあらざる時節、まどひなくさとりなく、諸佛なく衆生なく、生なく滅なし (Mizuno 2002: 49).

both inhabit the conventional world of arising and ceasing and the stilled world of complete liberation and cessation.

Gabyō (*Wahin*)

In *Gabyō* (*The Painted Rice Cake*) Dōgen articulates this view in its most general form.[5] The Linji (Rinzai) master Xiangyan Zhixian 香嚴智閑 (??–898) was challenged by his master Guishan to say something that would express the nature of awakening. After poring through the scriptures and finding nothing that would suffice, he responded, "A painted rice cake cannot satisfy hunger." (A painted rice cake here is a painting of a rice cake, not a real rice cake on which paint has been applied.) He is said to have attained awakening later on, not through any discursive exercise but from hearing the sound of a tile fragment knocking against bamboo while sweeping the ground.

The painted rice cake metaphor would become a standard trope for impotent discursive thought and language. Dōgen, however, echoing the *Vimalakīrti*, believes that this metaphor and the story in which it figures both reinscribe a higher-order duality no less pernicious than the one it criticizes and suggests a domain beyond discursivity that is nonetheless contentful. He responds to this proverb in dramatic fashion in *Gabyō*:

> The pigments for painting cakes should be the same as the pigments for painting mountains and waters. That is, we use blue cinnabar to paint mountains and waters, and we use rice flour to paint painted cakes. Such being the case, what is used is the same and the work is identical.

[5] Although this text is most often known as *Gabyō*, following contemporary Japanese pronunciation, Dōgen makes it clear that he intends the classical Japanese/Chinese pronunciation of the name as *Wahin*.

> This being so, the "painted cake" spoken of here means that all the pastry cakes, vegetable cakes, milk cakes, roasted cakes, steamed cakes, and so forth—all of them appear from paintings. We should realize that the paintings are equal, the cakes are equal, the dharmas are equal. For this reason, the cakes appearing here are all "painted cakes." When we seek painted cakes other than these, we will never meet them, never bring them out. While they may be a simultaneous occurrence, they are a simultaneous non-occurrence. Nevertheless, it is not [that they show] signs of old age or youth, it is not [that they leave] traces of coming and going. Here, in such a place, the land of the "painted cake" appears and is established.[6]

A painting of a rice cake delivers an illusion. Dōgen follows the Indian tradition in taking as a paradigm of an illusion not something that appears to exist but does not (a hallucination), but something that exists in one manner but appears in another—a deception. The painted rice cake appears to be a rice cake—something that could satisfy desire—but is in fact a mere painting, which might stimulate desire but which could never satisfy it. Nonetheless, to be a convincing illusion, there must be the possibility of a real rice cake for which the painted rice cake is confused. If there were only painted rice cakes, they could not serve as illusions.

Nonetheless, Dōgen claims, there are only painted rice cakes, and, as he makes explicit, this goes not only for rice cakes but for all phenomena. Everything we ever experience is merely "painted," including the mountains and waters that constitute the world in

[6] 餅を畫する丹膜は、山水を畫する丹膜とひとしかるべし。いはゆる山水を畫するには青丹をもちゐる。畫餅を畫するには米麺をもちゐる。恁麼なるゆゑに、その所用おなじ、功夫ひとしきなり。しかあればすなはち、いま道著する畫餅といふは、一切の糊餅菜餅乳餅燒餅餅等、みなこれ畫圖より現成するなり。しるべし、畫等餅等法等なり。このゆゑに、いま現成するところの諸餅、ともに畫餅なり。このほかに畫餅をもとむるには、つひにいまだ相逢せず、未拈出なり。一時現なりといへども一時不現なり。しかあれども、老少の相にあらず、去來の跡にあらざるなり。しかある這頭に、畫餅國土あらはれ、成立するなり (Mizuno 2006: 118–119).

which we find ourselves. We experience things only subject to the conditions of our own sense organs and sense faculties. All experience, Dōgen emphasizes, is constructed in this way. Despite that obvious fact, the things we so experience—that we construct in cognition in response to sensory contact—present themselves to us in consciousness as though they exist independently and are merely passively encountered, delivered as they are in themselves by transparent and veridical sensory faculties, directly to our minds. The rice cakes we paint in thought appear to us as though they are sesame, herb, milk, or millet cakes.

That illusion is inescapable so long as we perceive. Perception delivers painted rice cakes to us as though they were real. This is of deep phenomenological significance, as this delusional aspect of perception obscures our own minds as well as the nature of the reality we inhabit from us. But here is the paradox, arising from this fusion of the metaphysical interrogation of the world of appearance with the phenomenological interrogation of our experience thereof: Illusion makes sense only if we can experience things in one way and *at least make sense* of them existing in another. We can't, however, make sense of things being experienced as they are, unmediated by our sensory and cognitive apparatus. That wouldn't be *experience*. Nonetheless, we experience the illusion that the things that appear to us exist just as they appear, simply delivered to our senses with properties that are independent of our perception.

Dōgen accepts this paradox. But, one might ask, what about attraction and aversion, the sources of suffering? We at least appear to develop these conative attitudes toward real things, not toward illusions. We are hungry for real, not for painted rice cakes. Dōgen bites the bullet (or the rice cake) here:

> This being so, if it is not a "painted cake," it has no cure that "satisfies hunger"; if it is not painted hunger, it never encounters a person; if it is not painted satisfaction, it has no efficacy. In general, satisfying hunger, satisfying non-hunger, not satisfying

> hunger, not satisfying non-hunger—if they are not painted hunger, they are not attained, they are not spoken of. We should study for a while the fact that this is a painted cake.[7]

Our hunger, its objects and we, ourselves, are all painted. All of experience is and can only be illusion. And this, despite the fact that illusion seems to demand the possibility of something beyond illusion. This, according to Dōgen, is the fundamental paradox of human existence. Not only do we live a life immersed in illusion, but we can't even cogently imagine what reality could be. The very idea of reality is itself illusory, despite being the foundation of the possibility of illusion itself. This takes the paradoxical nature of existence just about as far as one can take it, and Dōgen takes this route with his eyes wide open.

Uji

In the next fascicle to which we turn, *Uji* (*Being-Time* or *The Time Being*), Dōgen introduces Huayan ideas into the mixture: the interpenetration of beings and times, with themselves and with each other:

> We should study that there are on all the earth the myriad phenomena, the hundred grasses; and that a single blade of grass, a single phenomenon is the entire earth. Coming and going like this is the start of practice. When one reaches such a field, it is one blade of grass, one phenomenon; it is understanding the phenomenon, not understanding the phenomenon, understanding

[7] しかあればすなはち、畫餅にあらざれば充飢の藥なし、畫飢にあらざれば人に相逢せず。畫充にあらざれば力量あらざるなり。おほよそ、飢に充し、不飢に充し、飢を充せず、不飢を充せざること、畫飢にあらざれば不-得なり、不道なるなり。しばらく這箇は畫餅なることを參學すべし (Mizuno 2006: 125).

> the grass, not understanding the grass. Since they are only at just such times, all "sometimes" are all the times, and both some grass and some phenomena are times. In the time of time after time, there are all the beings, all the worlds. We should reflect for a while whether or not there all the beings or all the worlds left out of this present time.[8]

There are countless entities in the world, each different from one another. But each of them is defined entirely by its relation to all of the others. That is the moral of the Huayan doctrine of interpenetration. Dōgen concludes from the fact that each thing is *constituted* by its relation to all other things, that each thing is *identical* to the entire world of dependently originated phenomena, presumably on the ground that identity consists in constitution. If so, Dōgen claims, then everything, as well as being distinct from everything else, is identical to the world, and hence to everything else.

As a piece of *metaphysics*, this argument is fallacious. The fact that a thing's identity is determined by its relations to other things hardly entails its identity with those things, and distinct entities are constituted by distinct sets of relations.[9] Dōgen also takes the point in a phenomenological direction, and when taken in that direction, one might think that it is not so bad. Here is how the argument could be reconstructed:

> We understand each thing in its individuality. We know what a blade of grass is, and we know this discursively. So, for each of the myriad things, to know it is to know it in its individuality: if we

[8] 盡地に萬象百草あり、一草一象おのおの盡地にあることを參學すべし。かくのごとくの往來は、修行の發足なり。到恁麼の田地のとき、すなはち一草一象なり、會象不會象なり、會草不會草なり。正當恁麼時のみなるがゆゑに、有時みな盡時なり、有草有象ともに時なり。時時の時に盡有盡界あるなり。しばらくいまの時にもれたる盡有盡界ありやなしやと觀想すべし (Mizuno 2006: 49).

[9] For an analysis of the ontology of Huayan interpenetration that does not equate it with identity, see Priest 2015.

> cannot distinguish it from everything else, we don't know it. But it is also true that to know that blade of grass as it is is to know it not as a blade of grass—an individual entity among entities—but as the world. To understand the blade of grass is to see that its boundaries are indeterminate, that its identity flows into the roots and the soil, the air and the water, the seeds from which it sprung and the cow who will eat it. There is no distinction between it and the world; to understand it is to understand that. Each of these two natures is a nature that must be grasped to understand grass.

But the two natures that are the objects of these two understandings—each of which constitutes an understanding of the blade of grass—are mutually inconsistent: a blade of grass is utterly particular and must be known in its particularity. On the other hand, it is also entirely non-particular and must be known as non-different from everything else. Nonetheless, both natures can both be known and must be known simultaneously if a blade of grass is truly to be known.

This makes sense as a reconstruction of Dōgen's view of the paradoxical nature of human experience. On his view, we must see each thing simultaneously as utterly particular and as identical to everything else. Nonetheless, even read in this way, we must grant that the argument is fallacious. For it still trades on an equivocation between interpenetration and identity. To see all things as interpenetrating in virtue of interdependence is one thing; to see them as literally identical—as sharing all properties—is another. Dōgen argues that we must see things as interpenetrating and as individual.

That is profound, perhaps, but not paradoxical; he helps himself to the slide from interpenetration to identity to get the paradox. Nonetheless, whether Dōgen is correct on this point, it is clear that he commits himself to accepting paradox here, and does not see that as especially problematic. Indeed, he seems to argue

(however fallaciously) that human experience itself is paradoxical. This is a theme to which we will return in the final chapter of this volume, where we will see that he might be right, but for the wrong reasons.

Dōgen then generalizes this to the case of time. Not only blades of grass, but moments interpenetrate one another. Each moment, like each blade of grass, is individual and distinct from each other moment. But each moment has its identity only in relation to all others. It is the structure of time as a whole that makes any moment that moment that it is. So each moment is at the same time unique and is all of time.

But that is not all. Time, Dōgen argues elsewhere, is nothing but *being*. That is, time is not a separate vessel in which existents exist and in which events happen. Instead, it is constituted by the constant change of existents and the flow of events. The present instant is the way the world is now; the next is the way the world will be then. And these are interdependent and interpenetrate. So inasmuch as each state of the world is a moment of time, and is at the same time interpenetrated by every other state of the world, each moment is each other moment, and so all of existence.

Dōgen's somewhat surprising conclusion about time bears an interesting comparison with an argument from McTaggart's famous 1908 paper, "The Unreality of Time." Somehow, the flow of time seems to be one of its distinctive features—unlike space, which does not appear to flow in any sense. Thus, events in time—such as the first moon landing—all start off as future, then become present, then become past. Hence, all events in time are past, present, and future. But these determinations are incompatible. If something is future, it is not past. If it is past, it is not present. So how is it possible that something can be past, present, and future? Simply because, one might suggest, at one point of time it is future; at a different point of time it is present; and at a third point of time it is past. But now, take any one of these times—say 1969. It itself is past, present,

and future. So we haven't avoided the contradiction, just relocated it. Of course, we can argue exactly analogously about 1969. How is it possible for 1969 to be past, present, and future? Because it was future at some time, present at some time, and past at some time. But we can consider any of those times and argue analogously. Clearly, we are off on an infinite regress.

The regress is, moreover, according the McTaggart, vicious. It purports to explain how a moment in time can be simultaneously past, present, and future, but we can only do so by reference to other moments that share that same contradictory predicament. Hence, it provides us no way out of the contradiction that all things are past, present, and future, even though nothing can be any two of these things. McTaggart, who could not imagine how a contradiction could be true, inferred that pastness, presentness, and futureness are unreal, as, then, is time. Dōgen goes a different way. Time is real (the phenomenology of the flow of time can hardly be gainsaid); but any being (or time) that is future is also present and past; any being that is past is also future and present; and so on. In any instant, there is all time and (and being, if this is identical with time)—even though this is contradictory.

Dōgen's thought is saturated by Huayan ideas, and there are clear resonances with McTaggart's argument (albeit with the acceptance of the contradicition) in Huayan texts themselves. Thus, in the *Treatise on the Golden Lion* (*Jin shizi zhang* 金師子章), Fazang says:

> The lion is a dharma produced from causes, arising and passing away from moment to moment. Each of these instants can be divided into three periods, namely, past, present, and future, and each of these three periods [also] contain past, present, and future. In total there are three times three units, thus forming nine ages, and these, grouped together, constitute a single dharma gate. Although these nine ages are each separated from one another, they emerge fused together without obstruction and collectively comprise a

> single moment. This is called the gate of the differentiated formation of the separate dharmas of the ten ages.[10]

Even though time can be divided into past, present, and future, the past exists as past now; the present as present now; the future as future now; the past existed as present in the past, and the present as future in the past, and so on. While these periods succeed one another, they coexist in the manifold of time. The being of grass is also thoroughly temporal, and so cannot be understood as anything other than *uji*, *time-being.* So to really apprehend grass as it is is doubly paradoxical: it is to apprehend it simultaneously as having the nature of grass and as having no nature; it is to apprehend it as existing over time and as existing only in an infinitesimal present. And since time can never be represented as a Newtonian container, but only as the temporality of grass and sentient beings, it is to understand grass as time, time as the being of the world, and so grass also as the being of the entire world.

In any case, what we have seen is that Dōgen's metaphysics and phenomenology are developed on the foundation of the paradoxical formulations of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Huayan. And Dōgen, rather than attempting to resolve those inconsistencies, self-consciously ramifies them into further inconsistencies and, in doing so, articulates a vision of being and of being-in-the-world that is patently dialetheic.

Kattō

In the last fascicle to which we turn, Dōgen turns his attention to a special and very important case of interpenetration: that between

[10] 師子是有爲之法。念念生滅...刹那之間。分爲三際...謂過去現在未來。此三際各有過現未來...總有三三之位。以立九世。即束爲一段法門...雖則九世各各有隔相。由成立融通無礙。同爲一念...名十世隔法異成門 (T.1880: 45.666a12–21).

speech and silence; that is, between discursive and non-discursive understanding. This will take us back to the discussion of this same topic in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*. The text is *Kattō* (*Tangled Vines*), and the vines in question are kudzu and wisteria. Both are vines: one is all display, while the other produces real food. They can climb only by wrapping themselves round other things, and indeed they can wrap around each other, each providing the support necessary for the other. This delivers the image on which Dōgen draws.

In Zen thought there is a familiar story about how Bodhidharma elected his successor, Huike, which Dōgen relates as follows:

> The twenty-eighth patriarch said to his disciples, "As the time is drawing near [for me to transmit the Dharma to my successor], please tell me how you express it."
>
> Daofu responded first, "According to my current understanding, we should neither cling to words and letters, nor abandon them altogether, but use them as instruments of the Dao (*dōyō*)."
>
> The master responded, "You express my skin."
>
> Then the nun Zongzhi, said, "As I now see it [the Dharma] is like Ānanda's viewing the Buddha-land of Akṣobhya, seeing it once and never seeing it again."
>
> The master responded, "You express my flesh."
>
> Daoyou said, "The four elements are emptiness, and the five *skandhas* are non-being. But in my view, there is not a single dharma to be expressed."
>
> The master said, "You express my bones. "
>
> Finally, Huike prostrated himself three times and stood [silently].
>
> The master said, "You express my marrow." [11]

[11] 第二十八祖、謂門人曰、時將至矣、汝等盍言所得乎。時門人道副曰、如我今所見、不執文字、不離文字、而爲道用。祖云、汝得吾皮。尼総持曰、如我今所解、如慶喜見阿閦佛國、一見更不再見。祖云、汝得吾肉。道育曰、四大本空、五蘊非有、而我見處、無一法可得。祖云曰、汝得吾骨。最後慧可、禮三拜後、位依而立。祖云、汝得吾髓 (Mizuno 2009a: 159–160; trans. Heine 2009: 151–152).

The standard interpretation of the story is that each of the respondents says something acceptable, but each gets progressively closer to the essence of things. Huike, like Vimalakīrti, indicates the ultimate, and so the ineffable. Bodhidharma therefore makes him his successor.

Dōgen's interpretation of the story, however, is quite different. He says:

> You should realize that the first patriarch's expression, "skin, flesh, bones, marrow," does not refer to the superficiality or depth [of understanding]. Although there may remain a [provisional] distinction between superior and inferior understanding, [each of the four disciples] expressed the first patriarch in his entirety. When Bodhidharma says "you express my marrow" or "you express my bones," he is using various pedagogical devices that are pertinent to particular people, or methods of instruction that may or may not be applied to different levels of understanding.
>
> It is the same as Śākyamuni's holding up the udambarra flower to Mahākāśyapa, or the transmission of the sacred robe [symbolic of the transmission of enlightenment]. What Bodhidharma said to the four disciples is fundamentally the selfsame expression. Although it is fundamentally the selfsame expression, since there are necessarily four ways of understanding it, he did not express it in one way alone. But even though each of the four ways of understanding is partial or one-sided, the way of the patriarchs ever remains the way of the patriarchs.[12]

[12] いま參學すべし、初祖道の汝得吾皮肉骨髓は、祖道なり。門人四員、ともに得處あり、聞著あり。その聞著ならびに得處、ともに跳出身心の皮肉骨髓なり、脱落身心の皮肉骨髓なり。知見解會の一著子をもて、祖師を見聞すべきにあらざるなり。能所彼此の十現成にあらず。しかあるを、正傳なきともがらおもはく、四子各所解に親疎あるによりて、祖道また皮肉骨髓の淺深不同なり。皮肉は骨髓よりも疎なりとおもひ、二祖の見解すぐれたるによりて、得髓の印をえたりといふ。かくのごとくいふいひは、いまだかつて佛祖の參學なく、祖道の正傳あらざるなり。しるべし、祖道の皮肉骨髓は、淺深に非ざるなり。たとひ見解に殊劣ありとも、祖道は得吾なるのみなり。その宗旨は、得吾髓の爲示、ならびに得吾骨の爲示、ともに爲人接人、拈草落草に足不足あらず。たとへば拈花のごとし、たとへば傳衣のごとし。四員のために道著するところ、はじめより一等なり。祖道は一等なりといへども、四解かならずしも一等なるべきにあらず。四解たとひ片片なりとも、祖道はただ祖道なり (Mizuno 2009a: 160–162; trans. Heine 2009: 151–152).

Dōgen's point is that the disciples' different replies do not indicate differences of depth, but merely different ways of saying the same thing (and each might be appropriate on different occasions). The speech of the first three disciples and the silence of Huike, then, are all equivalent. So, in an implicit commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, Dōgen emphasizes that even when expressing the inexpressible, silence cannot be privileged over speech.

After all, a discourse, like a body, is an integrated whole, and each part of it is necessary for the others. The utterances of these disciples are mutually dependent, like the parts of the body. One might say that these interpenetrate. Indeed, Dōgen says, Bodhidharma goes on to put a Huayan spin on the interchange between master and disciples itself as follows:

> You should realize that when you express me, then I express you, expression expresses both me and you, and expression expresses both you and me. In studying the mind of the first patriarch, you must realize the oneness of the interior and exterior [dimensions]. If we do not realize that the whole body permeates his body, then we have not realized the domain of the manifestation of the Buddhas and the patriarchs. Expressing the skin is expressing the bones, flesh, marrow. Expressing the bones, flesh, and marrow is expressing the skin, flesh, face, and eyes. It is none other than the awakening of the true body experienced throughout the entire ten directions of the universe, and [the realization of] the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. In that way, you express my robe and express the Dharma.[13]

[13] しるべし、「汝得吾」あるべし、「吾得汝」あるべし、「得吾汝」あるべし、「得汝吾」あるべし。祖師の身心を参見するに、内外一如なるべからずといはば、渾身は通身なるべからずといはば、仏祖現成の國土にあらず。皮をえたらんは、骨肉髓をえたるなり。骨肉髓をえたるは、皮肉面目をえたり。ただこれを尽十方界の真実体と暁了するのみならんや、さらに皮肉骨髓なり。このゆゑに得吾衣なり、汝得法なり (Mizuno 2009a: 164; trans. Heine 2009: 153–154).

So what has this to do with kudzu and wisteria? Dōgen sets the context for this discussion as follows:

> My late master [Ruijing] once said: "The vine of a gourd coils around the vine of a[nother] gourd like a wisteria vine." I have never heard this saying from anyone else of the past or the present. The first time I heard this was from my late master. When he said, "the vine of a gourd coils round the vine of a[nother] gourd," this refers to studying the Buddhas and patriarchs directly from the Buddhas and patriarchs, and to the transmission of the Buddhas and patriarchs directly to the Buddhas and patriarchs. That is, it refers to the direct transmission from mind-to-mind (*ishin-denshin*).[14]

The direct transmission is the silence of Huike and Kāśyapa. That is the vine of the gourd. Language is the wisteria vine. Each is necessary for the other to achieve its aim. And, despite being so different from one another, they end up being of exactly the same nature. This returns us to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*. This is exactly the point that the goddess makes when she admonishes Śāriputra not to abandon language for silence, since words are not internal, not external, and not in between. And it is exactly the final entanglement between Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti, in which words must be abandoned for silence, which thereby becomes one more word. Internalized, it is the reminder that while the inadequacy of discursive understanding to reality might demand a direct, non-discursive understanding, that non-discursive understanding can only arise in dependence on the discursive. Moreover, if it is genuine understanding, that understanding itself enters the realm of the discursive. And so, just as we saw in Chapter 5, ultimate truth

[14] 先師古仏云、「葫蘆藤種纏葫蘆」。この示衆、かつて古今の諸方に見聞せざるところなり。はじめて先師ひとり道示せり。「葫蘆藤」の「葫蘆藤」をまつふは、仏祖の仏祖を参究し、仏祖の仏祖を証契するなり。たとへばこれ以心伝心なり (Mizuno 2009a: 158; trans. Heine 2009: 151).

only makes sense in the context of conventional truth, and once it is seen to be merely conventional, ceases to be genuinely ultimate.

Conclusion

This concludes our brief survey of Dōgen's deployment of paradox, both appropriated and original. He sees these paradoxes clearly. He does not take them as problems to be solved, but as tools to be deployed. And he does deploy them. His deployment takes the paradoxes one step deeper. Dōgen, unlike Laozi, Zhuangzi, or even his Chinese Buddhist predecessors, argues that not only is reality inconsistent, issuing in paradoxes of ontology, and not only is it impossible to characterize reality discursively, leading to paradoxes of expressibility, but that our experience itself is paradoxical. He believes that this is so in part because our experience borrows the representational and conceptual structure of language, but also because the only reality we ever know is the one that we experience, and the inconsistency of that reality means that our experience, as well, is inescapably inconsistent. As we will see, the intuition that our experience is ineliminably contradictory is pursued further by Kitarō Nishida and his followers in the Kyoto School.

7

Dialetheism in the Work of Nishida Kitarō

Yasuo Deguchi and Naoya Fujikawa

The previous two chapters have been concerned with the approach to contradiction and paradox in medieval Chan and Zen. In the *gong'an* literature of China and in the philosophical essays of Dōgen, we found an *embrace* of paradox. One might suspect that this attitude is itself medieval, reflecting a lack of modern sophistication or encounter with Western philosophy and logic. But that is not so. As Zen thought moves into the 20th (and now on into the 21st) century, Japanese philosophers preoccupied with Zen but also educated in Western philosophy continued to see paradox not as a problem, but rather as an insight. This is most apparent in the Kyoto School.

In this chapter, we turn to the thought of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), the founder of the influential Kyoto School of philosophy. Nishida was an eclectic thinker. He drew on the tradition of Zen Buddhism, but he also read widely in Western philosophy, and he married Zen ideas to the thought of many Western philosophers, including William James, Henri Bergson, and Martin Heidegger. His ideas developed over his working life, but at the core of them was always a concern for a Zen notion of ultimate reality, which was often (although not always) identified as mind.[1] In this chapter we will look at two aspects of his later

[1] For general introductions to Nishida's philosophy, see Heisig 2001, and Maraldo 2015.

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philosophy: his theory of place and absolute nothingness, and his theory of self. We begin with Nishida's account of *place* (*basho* 場所), and how this account determines his understanding of the nature of consciousness. We then consider Nishida's later theory of contradictory self-identity, concluding with his thoughts on overcoming the final dichotomy: that between the dichotomous and the non-dichotomous.[2]

Nishida on Place and Nothingness

Nishida's earliest discussion of place and absolute nothingness can be found in two of his essays from 1926, "Place" and "The Problems of Consciousness Left Behind." According to the theory he develops at this stage of his thought, a relation among objects holds only in a place (*basho*): if two objects stand in a relation to one another, they must do so in some place. In particular, objects that relate to each other must *be within* the same place. He is drawing his understanding from the relations that hold among physical objects that share a spatial relationship.

Nishida's notion of places and of objects within them, however, is more general and abstract. According to Nishida, these notions can be set within subsumptive judgments of the form "A is B," where the subject, A, is subsumed by the predicate, B. Nishida claims that a subject of such a judgment corresponds to an object; and its predicate corresponds to a place in which the object is located. The subsumptive relation between a subject and a predicate corresponds to the *being-within* relation between an object and a place. For example, the judgment "red is a color" means that redness as an object is within the concept of color as a place; that is, that redness is a location within the logical space of color.

[2] References to Nishida in this chapter are to the collected works, Takeda et al. 2002–2009.

Nishida distinguishes the *being-within* relation between an object and a place from a relation between two objects. To understand this distinction, consider the following star and dot:

* •

The star and the dot are two different objects, and the former is written to the left of the latter (just as many letters are printed on this sheet of paper and are related to each other in various ways). This relation between the star and the dot is an example of a relation between different objects. Now, in addition to this relation (and other relations among symbols on this sheet of paper), there is a relation between the star and the dot, on the one hand, and this sheet of paper, on the other: they are printed on this sheet of paper. The relation between the star and the dot holds in virtue of the fact that they are printed on this sheet of paper. The *being-within* relation is illustrated by this relation between these symbols and the sheet of paper: this star and this dot cannot relate to each other without being printed on this sheet of paper. Their being printed on this paper ensures the very possibility of this particular physical relation.[3]

This is why the *being-within* relation is not a relation between two objects; in particular, the second relatum of the relation, that is, a place, cannot be another object. If a place is not an object, what is it? Nishida's answer is that it is *nothingness*. More of this shortly. But before going on, it is appropriate to comment on Nishida's terminology. Nishida uses several different terms to refer to the *being-within* relation. One of these is "reflect" (*utsusu* 映す). This terminology indicates that a place reflects the enveloping location of an object. In this sense, Nishida takes a place to be like a *mirror*: it provides a context in which something can appear. Another of these is "see" (*miru* 見る). A place, as a seer, sees an object within which it is. Thus, Nishida says:

[3] Nishida also uses the term "envelop" to refer to the *being-within* relation. In this terminology, a place envelops an object that is located within it.

> One may think that seeing and mirroring are mere metaphors. But the fundamental significance of mirroring or seeing is in no other fact that in subsumptive judgment, the subject is in the predicate. The predicate is the mirroring mirror and the seeing eye.[4]

More of this, also, in a moment.

Given this understanding of the notion of place, Nishida claims that *what it is* to be an object is to be located within a place. This definition entails that the notions of *being an object* and *being a place* are relative to one another: something is an object only with respect to some place, but a place that reflects some objects can be an object with respect to some other place that reflects it—a background against which it can appear. Thus, red is a color, but color is perceived by sight and so is subsumed by the superordinate category of the visible. Nishida calls a place that can be an object with respect to some other place nothingness (*mu* 無) or *relative nothingness* (*sōtai mu* 相対無).

Moreover, and here is where the paradox is generated, Nishida also holds that there is an "ultimate place," that is, a place that can never be an object with respect to any other place. Nishida calls this ultimate place *absolute nothingness* (*zettai mu* 絶対無), and identifies it with ultimate reality as understood in the Zen tradition. Absolute nothingness is, so to speak, the (maximally) "inclusive" place that includes all places. It follows that it is not an object at all. As Nishida says: "The true *One* must be the place of absolute nothingness, something that can never be determined as a being, within which every being is and by which every being is seen."[5]

[4] 見るとは映すとかいふのは譬喩に過ぎないと考へられるかも知らぬが、包摂判断に於て主語が述語の中にあるといふことが、映すとか見るとかいふことの根本的意義に他ならない。述語的なるものが映す鏡であり、見る-眼である (3.446; trans. ibid 75).

[5] 真の一者は絶対無の場所といふ如きものでなければならぬ、有としては絶対に限定することのできないものであつて、すべての有は之に於てあり、之によつて見られるものでなければならぬ (7.224). Note that Nishida uses "being" and "object" interchangeably.

Exactly the same point can be made with reference to another of Nishida's characterizations of absolute nothingness. He claims that absolute nothingness is the transcendent predicate, the predicate that can never be the subject of any subsumptive judgment.[6] As we have seen, the grammatical subject of a subsumptive judgment corresponds to an object that is within a place corresponding to its predicate. Since the transcendent predicate can never be a subject of any subsumptive judgment, absolute nothingness can never be an object.

An immediate consequence of the fact that absolute nothingness can never be an object is that absolute nothingness is ineffable. This is because something is ineffable if one cannot make any judgment about it, or attribute any characteristic to it. That is, something is ineffable if it refuses any predication. Therefore, absolute nothingness can never be the subject of any judgment, and so is ineffable. That absolute nothingness is ineffable in this sense is a straightforward consequence of Nishida's claim that it is a transcendent predicate, a predicate that can never become the subject of any subsumptive judgment. There is no judgment whose subject denotes absolute nothingness, and thus, there is no judgment about it.

Consciousness as a Self-Reflective Mirror

We have seen that according to Nishida, absolute nothingness is not an object, and that it is ineffable. And, one might think, matters would end there, since Nishida associates absolute nothingness with a specific kind of consciousness and uses this to explain how one can understand consciousness without objectifying it.[7]

[6] As Nishida explicitly notes, this is the inversion of the Aristotelian notion of first substance. Aristotle defines a first substance as something that is the subject of a subsumptive judgment, but never can be the predicate of a subsumptive judgment.

[7] "When the universal serves as a place within which all beings are, it becomes consciousness" 一般的なるものが、すべて有るものが於てある場所となる時、

Nishida draws a distinction between the consciousness of which one is conscious (*ishikiserareta ishiki* 意識せられた意識) and consciousness that is conscious (*ishikisuru ishiki* 意識する意識), that is, between consciousness when it is an object of introspective awareness, and consciousness when it figures as pure subjectivity. Both kinds of consciousness are instances of nothingness, in the sense that they are places within which their objects exist.[8] Consciousness of which one is conscious, however, is only a relative nothingness, since it is enveloped by consciousness that is conscious. Consciousness that is conscious, on the other hand, is absolute nothingness. There thus can be no place within which it exists.[9]

Since Nishida argues that knowledge must be understood as the being-within relation between an object and consciousness that is conscious, and since consciousness that is conscious is not an object at all, Nishida characterizes the structure of knowledge itself as "seeing without a seer." This is the central idea in Nishida's attempt to overcome the duality of subject and object in epistemology: since consciousness that is conscious is not an object, but rather is nothingness, there is no duality. Thus Nishida emphasizes the non-objectifiable nature of consciousness that is conscious.

But now paradox looms. This is because Nishida is also committed to the view that absolute nothingness *is* an object, as he

意識となるのである (3.434). Also: "It can be said that consciousness that is conscious is the place of absolute nothingness" 意識する意識といふのは絶対無の場所といふことができる (7.222).

[8] For Nishida's discussion on existence and, in particular, on the relation between "be" as copula and "be" as existence, see 3.431–436, trans. ibid 63–68. His discussion is complicated, but one way to understand it is as follows. In the subsumptive judgment "A is B," in which "is" appears as a copula, B, which is a place of A, is also taken as a being (with respect to some place within which B is). On the other hand, once we focus on the non-being of B as a place, we have "A is," and this is an existential statement in which "is" means existence. Thus he claims that "[w]e can think of so-called existence as a particular case of the universal copula" 所謂存在とは一般的繫辞の特殊なる場合と考えることができる (4.432; trans. ibid 63).

[9] K. C. Bhattacharyya in *Subject as Freedom* (1930) develops a startlingly similar analysis of consciousness and self-consciousness, influenced by Advaita Vedānta.

must, since he has been talking about it at length, and insofar as it is a content of thought or of language it is an object of consciousness. He claims that absolute nothingness is a mirror that reflects itself within itself.[10] Indeed, according to Nishida, this reflexive self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) is the fundamental structure of consciousness and thus of absolute nothingness. On his view, without self-awareness, there could be no awareness of anything else as object of the self; this self-awareness is hence always available in any moment of object-consciousness.[11] Absolute nothingness is thus present as an object within itself, despite also not being an object.

Nishida makes this point when he says that "it is possible to say that self-awareness is the identity of what envelops and what is enveloped, the identity of a place and a being that is within that place."[12] The same point is made from an epistemological point of view. As we have seen, knowledge is the being-within relation between consciousness that is conscious and things enveloped within it. The former is the knower (or the seer), which is not an object at all, and the latter is the known, which is the object of knowledge. It then follows from the self-awareness of consciousness that consciousness itself is both subject and object. As Nishida himself says, "in self-awareness, the knower and the known are one."[13] So, since they are one, in self-consciousness, the subject, or absolute nothingness, must both be an object in that it is *known* and must at the same time fail to be an object, as it is also the *knower*.

To put this another way, absolute nothingness is within itself. But if absolute nothingness is within some place, this means that it is an object with respect to the place—for this is Nishida's definition

[10] This doctrine has Indian Buddhist roots in the notion of "reflexive awareness" (*svasaṃvedana*), which Pramāṇavāda exegetes considered definitive of consciousness. Nishida was conversant with this doctrine.

[11] We also find this argument both in Pramāṇavāda texts and in the Vedānta-inflected phenomenology of K. C. Bhattacharyya.

[12] 自覚とは包むものと包まれるものとが同一なること、場所と「於てあるもの」とが同一であると云ふことができ (4.337–338).

[13] 自覚に於ては知るものと知られるものとが一である (4.335).

of being an object! Absolute nothingness as known is thus an object, while as knower is no object at all. Nishida's characterization of absolute nothingness as a self-reflecting mirror thus entails the contradictory nature of absolute nothingness. Moreover, Nishida explicitly acknowledges and affirms this contradiction. He says:

> "I" [viz. consciousness that is conscious, i.e., absolute nothingness] envelops a contradiction within itself. In the same way, a thing being within the self-aware universal, which determines a thing knowing itself, contradicts itself in the sense that to know is to be known and the knower is the known. [14]

Clearly, then, Nishida, like the classical and medieval philosophers we have discussed earlier, is a dialetheist. In particular, he is a dialetheist about absolute nothingness and consciousness.[15]

Another contradiction is quickly forthcoming. As we have noted, it is a consequence of Nishida's account that absolute nothingness is ineffable. Nonetheless, one can say things about it. Indeed, Nishida himself does, as we have seen. Absolute nothingness is, then, both effable and ineffable. Indeed, this contradiction follows from the first: since it is not an object, one can predicate nothing of it; but since it is an object, one can. (For example, one can say, as Nishida does, that it both is and is not an object!) We have already seen in Chapter 1 that this paradox of ineffability arises with respect to the Dao, of which absolute nothingness is an intellectual descendent,

[14] 「私」とは自己自身の中に矛盾を包むものである。之と同じく自己自身を知るものを限定する自覚的一般者に於てあるものは、知ることが知られることであり、知られるものが知るものであると云ふ意味に於て、自己自-身に矛盾するものでなければならぬ (4.109).

[15] The quoted passage is from "Noumenal World" written in 1928. The following passage shows that Nishida is committed to contradictions even in his "Place." "That which is truly universal must be that which transcends both being and nothing and yet envelops them within, that is, that which includes contradiction within itself." 真に一般的なるものは有無を超越し而も之を内に包むもの、即ち自己自身の中に矛盾を含むものでなければならぬ (3.456; trans. ibid 84.)

and that it re-emerges in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, as well as in the thought of Dōgen.

This second contradiction also delivers a second argument for the conclusion that, according to Nishida, absolute nothingness is an object. As we have seen, he argues that to be an object is to be within a place, and to be within a place is to be a subject of a subsumptive judgment. If there is a subsumptive judgment whose subject is absolute nothingness, absolute nothingness is an object. But, as we have seen, and as Nishida shows, one can assert judgments about absolute nothingness. It follows that absolute nothingness is an object.

Nishida thus endorses two related contradictions about absolute nothingness: that it is and is not an object, and that it is and is not ineffable. As we saw, Nishida identifies absolute nothingness with a certain kind of consciousness. This brings us to the broader topic of the self, to which we now turn, focusing on Nishida's account of the self in his late philosophy as constituted by what he calls the logic of contradictory self-identity.

The Self

Like many East Asian Buddhists, Nishida was committed to non-dualism as a fundamental ontological and phenomenological standpoint. We have already mentioned that Nishida tries to overcome the duality of subject and object by appealing to his logic of *basho* and the notion of absolute. As we have seen, philosophers in this tradition endeavored to overcome duality in many senses. In doing so, they noted both non-dual and dual aspects both of reality and of experience.

Their ultimate goal was to overcome what we might call the final duality—that between the dual and the non-dual. For instance, as we saw in previous chapter, exegetes in the Sanlun, Tiantai, and Chan traditions recognized the problem, and experimented with

both dialectical and dialethic solutions. Nishida also confronted and tried to overcome this final duality. Indeed, this preoccupied his thought, especially toward the end of his career.

In his later writings, Nishida argues that the self must be understood in terms of something that is ontologically prior to it—he calls this the absolute or the world. He dismisses any view of the self that treats this absolute as subjective, psychological, or individualistic, and hence hypostasizes or reifies the self as an independent entity (9.490). The alternative, he claims, is to approach the self from the standpoint of the world, rather than thinking of the world from the standpoint of the self (9.490).

According to Nishida, Kant is paradigmatic of philosophers who think the world from the standpoint of the self (9.490). By proposing to understand the self from the standpoint of the world, he seeks an alternative approach to Kantian subjective constructivism; it is in this respect that Nishida's approach is "anti-subjective."[16] Nishida distinguishes two versions of anti-subjectivism: the Western and the Eastern. In the West, he claims, the self is set up against the absolute—that is, it remains other than it and exists only in relation to it. In the Eastern view, by contrast, Nishida asserts that the self returns to the world (9.461–462), developing a sense of the self that comprises the absolute as part of it. We will refer to these two position as "confrontational" and "reversional" anti-subjectivism, respectively.

During his philosophical career, Nishida proposed several versions of an non-dualistic, deflationary and reversionally anti-subjectivistic self. He characterized his final view in such terms as "active intuition" (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観) and the "logic of contradictory self-identity" (*mujunteki jikodōitsu no ronri* 矛盾的自己同一の論理). In this final account of the self, Nishida is most directly and deeply committed to dialetheism. Indeed, Nishida's dialetheism is to be understood in light of his efforts to expound the

[16] Nishida calls this stance "absolute objectivism" or "absolute logicism" (9.490, 491).

minimalistic, non-dualistic, and reversionally anti-subjectivistic self. In the following sections, we reconstruct his dialetheism with respect to the self and explore the meaning and role of dialetheia in Nishida's late philosophy.

Self as Active Intuition

Nishida develops his final understanding of the self in terms of what he calls "active intuition." By "active intuition," Nishida means an active and somatic intuition, rather than a passive and static one (8.215–218). It is a sort of embodied knowledge: "seeing" something through one's bodily action (8.216). By bodily action he does not have in mind the sitting meditation in Zen monastic practice that stands against the mundane activities required to earn one's living. Instead, his paradigmatic illustration is the manual labor intended to produce artifacts or what he calls *poiēsis*.[17]

Think of a master carpenter building a house using construction materials and tools (8.370; 9.131). Such activity manifests intuitive knowledge that can be attained through daily practice in a determinate social setting.[18] What does the carpenter come to know through her manual labor? Nishida's first answer is that she comes to understand the materials; a master carpenter intuits the nature of her timbers, hammers, and so on, through handling them (8.219, 221, 222).

[17] Nishida writes: "reality is [the situation] where we exist and work. The working is not merely willing, but producing materials. We produce the materials." 我々がそこにおいてあり、そこにおいて働くところが現実なのである。働くということはただ意志するということではない、物を作ることである。我々が物を作る (8.372).

[18] The apparent similarity between Nishida's romanticized carpenter and Heidegger's account of *Dasein* in terms of the structure of equipment is coincidental; Nishida was not aware of Heidegger's work when he developed this idea. Instead, it is an echo of the Marxism that was influential among Japanese intellectuals at that time. Also Nishida was inspired by the fact that Jesus's father, Joseph, was a carpenter rather than a noble, taking his occupation as a symbol of the humble and mundane (9.112).

Moreover, through active intuition, according to Nishida, we come to know ourselves. He wrote: "our individual self-awareness takes place through production" (8.371). The carpenter thus comes to know the nature and quality of her own activity or production through her actions. So Nishida's self is the self that intuits itself through its somatic activities: its essence lies in its bodily action or productive activity (9.527). It is thus an embodied self that understands itself through *poises* (8.300–301).

It is worth pausing to note the evolution of Nishida's thought from the period of his reflection on *basho* to this later period. As we saw, in his earlier thought, he conceived of self-knowledge as immediate and reflexive; in contrast, in his later writings, self-knowledge is mediated by the world. Nonetheless, in each period, Nishida takes the structure of self-knowledge to entail contradiction.

Nishida does not argue that active intuition is merely the *essence* of the self, but that the self is *nothing but* active intuition. In this sense, the self is sometimes characterized as "active-intuitive self" (9.120). Hence Nishida does not claim that the self exists as a substance or substratum that occasionally entertains active intuition. Instead, he claims that the self doesn't exist independently of active intuition or that the former is simply reduced to the latter, thus continuing the project of avoiding reification that we saw in the *basho* period.

Nishida also argues that active intuition is nothing but an event (9.131). A spatio-temporarily delimited event is ontologically fundamental on this view. He calls this fundamental event the only-once-fact (*ichido-teki-jijitsu* 一度的事実 [9.477, 479, 482]). In this respect, Nishida is in the same boat as Dōgen who, in *Uji*, identifies being with time, calling it being-time, and asserting that all entities are in fact spatio-temporal events.[19] The self is also a delimited event, instead of a substance, and so may be thought of as less substantial.

[19] There are also obvious affinities between the late Nishida and the late Heidegger who took event or *Ereignis* as the ontologically fundamental category (Heidegger 2012).

As active intuition is an historical event that always occurs in specific social and historical conditions (9.131), it has an impact on human affairs. For instance, if a carpenter's active intuition can produce a house that is attractive and innovative enough to be copied by his contemporaries and future generations, it can result in a new style that changes the way we live. In such a way, self as active intuition can still serve as an agent of social engagements

Self, the World, and the Materials

Let us distinguish the narrow self—that which supervenes only on our body—from the broad self—that which includes the materials along with the narrow self. The narrow self, on Nishida's view, is dichotomous in that it presupposes the distinction between self and non-self. But the broad self is not. It includes not only the materials but the entire world. This is the heart of Nishida's reversional anti-subjectivism, according to which ontological priority is given to the world or the absolute: the broad self as active intuition then comprises three items: the narrow self, the materials, and the world or the absolute. Let us try to make sense of this account.

The world in this context is the totality of all entities. According to Nishida, it is the creator of those entities as well (9.114, 116), including the self. Nishida sometimes characterizes the world as the Christian God (9.122), "life of Buddha" (*hotoke no inochi* 仏の命, a term taken from Dōgen; Nishida 9.74), the "Dao" of the Daoists, and the "Heaven" (*tian* 天) of the Confucians (Nishida 9.67, 75). He often characterizes it as "One," citing the Chinese Huayan Buddhist phrase: One is all, and all is one.[20]

[20] See, for example, Nishida 9.71. This phrase is ubiquitous in Huayan materials; see, for example, the *Five Treatises* by Fazang, the third patriarch of the school: 一即一切一切即一 (T.1866).

Nishida illustrates the relation between the absolute and the self by drawing on an image from Leibniz's monadology and the Huayan "net of Indra," in which each monad or each jewel-node of the net reflects or expresses the entire world or net. In the same sense, Nishida says, everything in the phenomenal world expresses or reflects its producer, that is, the world. For instance, a house expresses or reflects its producer, a carpenter: it manifests her skills, taste, vision, and so forth. Similarly one self expresses or reflects the world in one way, while another expresses or reflects it in another way.

But an expression or reflection is necessarily distinct from that which is expressed or reflected: a reflected image of Indra's net in a single jewel is not the net itself, but a reflection of the net. A single house is merely one of many expressions or reflections of the carpenter, but is not the carpenter herself. Likewise, I am not the world itself, but merely one of many expressions or reflections of it.

While admitting this distinction between the world and its expressions or reflections, Nishida nevertheless also claims that each expression or reflection is nothing but the world itself. He wrote: "As far as our selves reflect the world, each of them becomes one world,"[21] and "Self expresses the entire world and it becomes the world."[22]

Here we see the influence of Huayan thought, as transmitted through Dōgen and other Japanese Buddhist exegetes. In Huayan thought, all things reflect, that is, interpenetrate, with each other. In our discussion of Dōgen's *Uji* in chapter 6, we noted that he appears to conflate numerical identity with interpenetration. It seems that Nishida is making the same illicit conflation here. Be that as it may, we emphasize that Nishida is clearly committed to the claim that numerical identity and interprenetation are the same thing. And

[21] 我々の自己は何處までも世界を映すものとして、一々が一つの世界となる (9.449).
[22] 自己が全世界を表現する、自己が世界となる (9.460).

it is also clear that this thesis generates contradiction; and, once again, it is a contradiction that Nishida explicitly endorses. Though being merely one of many expressions or reflections of the world, the narrow self is the world itself. It follows that the narrow self both is the world and is not the world.

Nishida also paraphrases this apparently paradoxical relation in terms of production: "despite being born and produced from this world, our selves are going to produce this world" (9.116), or more tersely "the produced is throughout the producer" (9.116). As a result, he sets up the reciprocal relation of production between the world and the narrow self. Nishida tries to explicate this apparent paradoxical relation as "relation of contradictory self-identity between many and one."[23]

Nishida argues that the relation between the narrow self and the world is analogous to that between the narrow self and materials. On the one hand, the carpenter handles a certain set of construction materials and tools, experiencing them as extensions of her own body and controls them as if they are parts of her body. On the other hand, she also experiences herself as controlled or conditioned by those materials. Nishida characterizes this control by the materials as follows: "While the materials are produced by us, conversely, they are independent and produced us."[24]

Thus, the interaction between the narrow self and the materials is one of reciprocal production, just like the relation between the narrow self and the world. Nishida describes this parallelism as follows: "Self becomes the material for the absolute."[25] In sum, active intuition is an event that involves the narrow self, the materials, and the world. We have called the event as a whole the broad self that embraces all three items.

[23] 多と一との矛盾的自己同一的関係 (9.120).
[24] 物は我々によつて作られたものでありながら、我々から獨立したものであり逆に我々を作る (8.372).
[25] 自己が絶対者の物となる (9.230).

Logic of Contradictory Self-Identity

As we have seen, Nishida explicates the relation between the narrow self and the world in terms of contradictory self-identity. He claims that the relation between the narrow self and materials is parallel to that between the narrow self and the world. So the entire structure of the broad self can be explicated by means of logic of contradictory self-identity.

Then what is the logic of contradictory self-identity? Nishida takes logic to be the most general structure of reality (8.8, 9, 284). In this sense, his understanding of logic is similar to that of Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*. But unlike logic on the Wittgensteinian view, Nishida's logic is not a system of inference (*Tractatus* 10.554). Nor does it comprise any principles or axioms. Instead, his logic is similar to an abstract model of mathematical science, as in classical mechanics. Nishida's logic is an abstract model of the self, in which various logical entities interact formally. In this logic of contradictory self-identity, the narrow selves, the materials and the world, are all logically interrelated with one another.[26]

Contradictory self-identity seems to have two meanings, one general and one specific. The general meaning can be framed in the light of violation of the law of non-contradiction; at times Nishida explicitly endorses some contradictions he holds to be true. The specific meaning can be explicated in terms of the endorsement of a contradiction with regard to identity—some entities are both identical to and distinct from one another.

Let us address the specific sense first. Nishida wrote:

> The true meaning of the principle of self-identity lies in being united with the absolute other.[27]

[26] Nishida characterized his logic as, for instance, "logic of self-awareness of self of *poiēsis*" (8.258) or logic that takes into account "working self" (8.8).

[27] 絶対の他と一なる所に、自己同一原理の真の意味があるのである (6.27).

> To say that [the world of historical reality] has its reality in the place where it transcends itself means that it consists in absolutely contradictory self-identity, that it has its self-identity in the absolute other, and that it doesn't have its self-identity in itself.[28]

These enigmatic claims can be rephrased as follows: for anything to exist, it must be self-identical; but to exist is to be constituted by, and to constitute, the world; hence, to exist is also to be identical with the world, or the absolute. Thus, everything must also be identical with something else, something that is not identical with itself, namely, the absolute, or the world that contains it. As we have seen, Nishida asserts this contradiction: the narrow self is identical with the world and it is not. It is not, because of its narrowness; it is, because of the identity of all things with the world. So the contradiction with respect to identity is claimed to hold between the narrow self and the world.

Nishida also asserts the same contradictory relation between the narrow self and the materials by claiming repeatedly that I am "thinking and doing [something] by becoming the thing."[29] So Nishida's phrase "the relation of contradictory self-identity between one and many" can be interpreted as indicating contradictions with respect to identity between the world (as one) and the narrow selves (as many), and between the narrow self (as one) and the materials (as many). The world is identical to one of the narrow selves and not, and the narrow self is identical to one of the materials and not.

We can now consider the general meaning of contradictory self-identity.[30] Besides *one* versus *many*, Nishida mentions many

[28] 自己自身を越える所に自己自身の實在性を有つと云ふことは、それが絶対矛盾の自己同一によつて成立し、絶対の他に於て自己同一を有つということを意味する、自己自身の中に自己同一を有たないと云ふことを意味するのである (8.287).

[29] 物となって考え、物となって行なう (10.303).

[30] Nishida took his contradictory self-identity as his formulation of the Chinese adverb *ji* 即, which combines such contradictory concepts as *one* versus *many*, *being* versus *nothing* as a copula (8.274).

dichotomous pairs of concepts in both Eastern and Western philosophy: *one* versus *all* (8.373), *being* versus *nothing* (10.148), *subjective* versus *objective*, *immanent* versus *transcendent* (10.130), *form* versus *material*, *to be* versus *ought to be* (10.134), *finite* versus *infinite*, *individual* versus *all* (10.134), and so on.

He claims that the narrow self and the world are each simultaneously one and many, entailing that the self is both subject and object. Thus he characterizes the narrow self as having such contradictory properties as internal (to a body) and external (from the body), and producer and the produced (10.20–21). He states, for example,

> Philosophy starts from the self-contradictory nature of our selves.[31]

> Our selves exist as contradictory entities in the historical world.[32]

> The real world is always seen dialectically. Reality is always self-contradictory.[33]

> The world is an infinite self-contradiction.[34]

The contradictory nature of the self is no accident in Nishida's philosophy; nor does Nishida view this contradictory nature as a *problem*. Instead, he takes it as the starting point of all philosophy (9.132). He also explicitly dismisses the law of non-contradiction as "a mere law of abstract thinking" (9.525), implying that his logic is not abstract but concrete, in that it models reality. Thus, in his

[31] 哲学は我々の自己の自己矛盾性から出立する (10.137).
[32] 我々の自己はかゝる矛盾的存在として歴史的世界に於てあるのである (8.9).
[33] 現実の世界といふのは、いつも弁証法的に見られる世界である。現実はいつも自己矛盾的なのである (8.81).
[34] 世界は無限なる自己矛盾である (9.506).

later writings, as in his earlier writings on *basho*, he is a full-fledged dialetheist.

In sum, Nishida's theory of contradictory self-identity is explicitly dialetheic: the narrow self and the world are identical to each other and not; the narrow self and the materials are identical to each other and not; and the narrow self and the world have contradictory properties with regard to some philosophical dichotomies (*being*, *non-being*; *unity*, *plurality*; *objectivity*, *subjectivity*; etc.). Once again, this is the result of an illicit identification of identity and interpenetration. But this is beside the point we emphasize here, which is simply that Nishida is a dialetheist about the self, and that Nishida believes that the contradictions he delimits reveal something profound about our existence.

Conclusion: Non-duality

Let us return, finally, to the topic of non-duality. Throughout Nishida's career he experimented with a variety of approaches to the duality of human experience and the apparent dualism of object and context. But the most important duality he identified is that between duality and non-duality.

Nishida intends to deal with this final duality by showing that all dichotomous pairs are at the same time non-dual, and that all non-dualities implicate the reality of dualities. Duality and non-duality, that is, on Nishida's view, are in the end the same thing. He sees clearly at each stage of his thought that any attempt at transcendence or sublation will entail contradiction; he does not view contradiction as a *reductio* on the project, but rather as evidence that being and experience are themselves paradoxical, and thus any adequate ontology or phenomenology will be inconsistent.

In confronting Nishida's thought we encounter the end of a long arc of ideas, beginning with Indian and early Chinese doctrines of ineffability, each carefully set out in language, and concerned

with the illusion of a duality in experience, dually related to the non-duality defended in each tradition. As these concerns are explored in East Asia, we see a willingness to approach the inevitability of contradiction as rooted in the paradoxical nature of reality. Nishida's concern with the transcendence of the duality between duality and non-duality is but a late move in a long game.

8

Review and Preview

Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest

In the preceding chapters, we have encountered a number of contradictions that are endorsed by various philosophers and traditions in East Asian philosophy. We emphasize that these philosophers and traditions are not *inadvertently* committed to contradictions in virtue of other things they say. Nor are they unaware of the contradictions to which they are committed. On the contrary, they deliberately assert and endorse contradictions—with their eyes wide open. That is, the East Asian philosophers and traditions whose work we have been addressing are explicitly dialetheist. Finally, we note that the contradictions endorsed are not peripheral to the philosophical perspectives in question. Rather, they are central to the views about the nature of reality and thought at issue. That is, the dialetheism is not a bug in these views; it is a feature. In order to hammer this point home, it may be useful, by way of summary, to make explicit the contradictions that we have encountered in previous chapters.

Chapter 2 addressed contradictions that arise in foundational Daoist texts. We first examined the *Laozi* and the nature of Dao, as understood by Wang Bi. We saw that, at least on his reading (and this is a plausible and well-respected reading), the Dao is both effable and ineffable. We have, then:

1. The Way (*dao* 道) is effable and ineffable.

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It is ineffable since it is not a thing, but the progenitor of all things. It is effable since the text talks about it, in particular by asserting that it is ineffable.

The second half of Chapter 2 examined two very different contradictions articulated in the *Zhuangzi*. The first concerns meaning:

2. There is and is not meaning.

Words are just sounds, like the piping of the wind, and so have no meaning. But Zhuangzi talks about these things and so conveys meaning. The second concerns argument. In particular:

3. There are and are not probative arguments.

There are not, because an argument can be probative only if it can be shown to be so; but to do so with an argument would be to beg the question; there is no other way to do so. There are probative arguments, however; for instance, this one.[1]

In Chapter 3, we turned to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*. We saw there, in the dialectic between Mañjuśri and Vimalakīrti, an endorsement of the view that the inexpressible ultimate reality can be described:

4. The inexpressible ultimate can be expressed.

Ultimate reality, since it transcends all dualities, cannot be described. Yet, as with the Way, the practitioners describe it, if only to say that it cannot be expressed. Moreover, we saw that only

[1] This is, in fact, close to a corollary of 2. Probative arguments require meanings. So the existence of probative arguments stands or falls with that of the existence of meanings. While the existence of meanings does not *entail* the existence of cogent arguments, it is a necessary condition of probative arguments.

silence can express the ultimate, not speech; nonetheless, when silence does express it, it becomes speech.

In Chapter 4, we met two Chinese Buddhist philosophers, Sanlun's Jizang, and Tiantai's Zhiyi. Jizang develops a dialectical progression through the *koṭis* of the *catuṣkoṭi.* At Jizang's final stage (stage four), he arrives at the position that the ultimate truth is inexpressible. In a now familiar pattern, however, Jizang says that this is the ultimate truth. Hence:

5. The ultimate truth is and is not expressible.

Moreover, at each stage of the dialectic, he is committed to contradictions which, while sublated at higher stages, nonetheless are asserted.

Tiantai struggles with the relationship between the two truths of Buddhism, conventional and ultimate. In an analysis of these, it introduces a third, middle (*zhong* 中), truth. Since the first two truths are two, they are different; but the middle is exactly the identity of these two. So we have:

6. The conventional is identical to the ultimate, and it is not identical to the ultimate.

In Chapter 5, we moved to Chan Buddhism, and in particular its handling of "public cases." Chan texts contain many apparent contradictions, such as that mountains are mountains, and mountains are not mountains. One standard move to try to defuse the contradiction is by appealing to the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality. "Mountains are mountains" is true conventionally, but "mountains are not mountains" is true ultimately. But following Madhyamaka precedents, Chan endorses the claim that the conventional and the ultimate are identical (and that they are not, and so we have contradiction 6 again). So "mountains are mountains" and "mountains are not mountains" are true both

conventionally and ultimately. Hence in both cases (which are and are not the same):

7. Mountains are mountains, and mountains are not mountains.

Chapter 6 took us with Dōgen from China to Japan. Here we met several contradictions, all of which, like those articulated in the Tiantai tradition in which Dōgen was ordained, are grounded in the relationship between the two truths articulated in Buddhist philosophy. In the passages from *Shōji* and *Genjōkōan*, we saw that Dōgen holds that to be awakened is to realize that there is no awakening. Hence:

8. There is and is not awakening.

There is nothing more than the conventional world. Hence, there is no ultimate to be grasped, and so no awakening to be attained. But to grasp this is precisely to grasp the ultimate, and so to attain awakening.

In *Gabyō*, we met a contradiction of a different kind, namely:

9. The world is and is not illusory.

The world is not, and cannot be, how we perceive it to be. Yet to suppose that it is other than this is to turn it into a *ding an sich* of untenable proportion.

The difficult *Uji* appears to endorse a paradox concerning identity:

10. All things are and are not identical to one another.

Thus, a field of grass and a blade of grass in the field are clearly not identical. But interpenetration discloses that their identities cannot

be disentangled. *Uji* then goes on to deliver a special case of this, concerning time, namely:

11. All instants of time are and are not identical (or at least simultaneous).

They are not, because the past precedes the present, and the present precedes the future; they are, because the past *now* is past; the present *now* is present; and the future *now* is future—the moments of time are timelessly co-present in array.

Finally, in *Kattō*, we returned to the topic of ineffability. In fact, what we have here is a rerun of the engagement between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśri, which we met in Chapter 3, and so we have its consequent contradiction:

12. The ultimate cannot be expressed, yet it must be.

This brought us to the discussion of Nishida in Chapter 7. We met two related topics concerning which he endorses contradiction. The first is absolute nothingness (consciousness that is conscious). Here we had:

13. Absolute nothingness is and is not an object.
14. Absolute nothingness is and is not ineffable.

It is not an object since it is the ultimate place, a place which is in no further place. Yet because one can be conscious of it, it is in a place, namely, consciousness—that is, itself. The second contradiction is a corollary of the first. Since absolute nothingness is not an object, one can say nothing about it. But since it is, one can—such as that it is an object.

We then turned to Nishida's later discussion of the self. Here, the central contradiction is as follows. We must distinguish between

the self (narrowly construed) and the world. According to Nishida, as we saw, the self both is and is not identical to the world. The self is a part of the world, and so distinct from it; but it is embedded in the network of relations that constitutes the world, and it is not distinct from these. So we have:

15. The world is identical to the self, and the world is not identical to the self.

For good measure, the self both is and is not also identical to the materials that constitute its *Dasein*:

16. The self is identical to the materials, and it is not identical to the materials.

Again, the self, the world, and the materials are all clearly distinct, but their interpenetration makes it impossible to disentangle their identity conditions. In all these contradictory matters, Nishida is drawing heavily on his background in Buddhism and Zen, articulating afresh some of the contradictions we have already met earlier.

So much for the contradictions themselves. Though there are connections between them, they fall into essentially four groups. The first concerns paradoxes of ineffability. This group comprises contradictions 1, 4, 5, 12, and 14. A certain theory tells us that something is ineffable, but it turns out to be expressible, too. Sometimes, as in contradictions 1 and 5, this is not stated, but is shown. In the others, 4, 12, and 14, the contradiction is explicitly endorsed.

As we noted in the Introduction to this book, contradictions of ineffability arise in several places in Western philosophy. As we also noted there, the philosophers whose views generated these paradoxes essayed elaborate—and ultimately unsuccessful—dodges to try to avoid them. Unlike their Asian colleagues whom we have just looked at, they do not take these contradictions as

revelations concerning the contradictory structure of reality itself.

In particular, contradictions of this kind derive from the fact that we are required to suppose that something both is and is not an object. For to be describable is exactly to be an object. If something is an object, one can say something about it—for example, that it is an object. Conversely, if it is not an object, one can say nothing of it. For to say that it is so and so is precisely to treat it as an object.[2] Bearing this in mind, we can see that contradiction 13 also belongs in this group.

The second group of contradictions concerns contradictory identities: some things both are and are not identical to one another. The contradictions in this group are 6, 10, 11, 15, and 16. In each case, we have a theory that tells us that things which are perforce distinct from one another are also identical to one another.

In fact, there is a connection between paradoxes in this group and those in the previous group. Something is an object (that is, effable) if and only if it is self-identical. The easiest way to see this is to establish the contrapositive. If something is not an object, it is not anything, and so not itself. Conversely, suppose that something is not itself. Clearly it is not anything else either. So it is not anything; that is, it is not an object.

The third group contains contradictions 7 and 8. These are contradictions that follow from the contradictory identity between conventional and ultimate reality (and so we might put contradiction 6 in this class too). So, for 7, we have mountains are mountains conventionally and are not mountains ultimately, but the conventional and the ultimate are identical; so, either way, we have both. And for 8, there is no awakening, since the conventional and ultimate are the same. Yet, since awakening is possible, the ultimate cannot be the conventional.

[2] For more on this, see Priest 2019b.

The other contradictions belong in a fourth group. This comprises contradictions 2, 3, and 9. These all concern the relationship between the subjective world and the objective world. In the case of 2, meaning, linguistic and otherwise, is a salient feature of the subjective world. It is absent from the objective world of protons and neutrons. For 3, as we noted, argument stands or falls with meaning. Contradiction 9 also concerns the subjective/objective dichotomy. The objective perspective tells us that the world is not as we experience it; but there is no objective perspective view of the world: there is no "view from nowhere." In each of these cases, then, we have a clash: we seem to be committed to both a subjective and an objective perspective, yet they are contradictory. One might, then, capture the contradictions in this group as follows:

17. The world is and is not independent of our cognitive apparatus.

So much for the congregation of paradoxes we have extracted from the thinkers and traditions we have discussed. As we emphasized in the Introduction, we have not endorsed any of these contradictions. That is not the point of this investigation. Our purpose has been to show that philosophers in these East Asian traditions, in fact, endorse contradictions, and so take them to be true—and to be philosophically significant, not as a sign that something has gone wrong in our attempt to understand reality, but as a sign that the reality we strive to understand is itself contradictory. That is, they are dialetheists.[3]

A discussion of the truth of all the contradictions in question, involving as it does a discussion of the truth of the views that deliver

[3] This is not to suggest that any of these philosophers subscribed to a correspondence view of truth. Dialetheism is the view that some contradictions are true—whatever one takes that to mean. And to say that reality is contradictory is simply to say that some of the statements that describe it are dialetheias.

them, would go a long way beyond what is possible here.[4] However, in the following, and final, chapter, we want to switch gears (again as noted in the Introduction) and discuss contradiction 17 in more detail. Only this time, we will argue that it is, indeed, true, and so endorse it ourselves.

[4] For a discussion of these matters, see Garfield and Priest 2003; Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008; and Garfield 2002: 170–186.

9

Epilogue

Mind in World, World in Mind

Robert H. Sharf

The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world; and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world that it itself projects.
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

The world and life are one.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Human beings are but tiny specks in a vast cosmos—carbon-based life forms on planet Earth, the third planet from the Sun in the Solar System situated in the Orion Arm of the Milky Way, a galaxy in the Virgo Supercluster, which is an appendage of the Laniakea Supercluster, which includes a mere 100,000 of the 200 billion or so galaxies in the known universe. We are members of a highly social, tool- and language-using species of primates (subphylum vertebrata, class *mammalia*) called *Homo sapiens*. Our species has been around for some 200,000 years, a tiny blip in the life of the universe that began with the big bang some 14 billion years ago. Any comprehensive account of the human condition must take into account the vast world in which we find ourselves.

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The physics of the cosmos, the biology of terrestrial life, and the evolutionary history of our species all play a crucial role in explaining who and what we are. The physical world surrounds us on all sides; it exceeds us temporally and spatially by unthinkable orders of magnitude, and we are utterly at its mercy. Without physical sustenance and protection from the elements, we soon die. Without sex, our species goes extinct. The philosophical musings of the most committed idealists or solipsists would appear to have a limited impact on the way they live their lives; they still need food in their bellies and a roof over their heads.

It is not only the material and biological domains that exceed us and make possible our existence. As a language-using social species, we have developed complex political, economic, and cultural systems that permeate and structure every aspect of our lived experience. Human culture and language, like the physical world, existed before I arrived on the scene and will continue after I have gone. Anything I think—indeed, that I think anything at all—is possible only through the epistemic scaffolding afforded by semiotic systems that are extrinsic to me. It is incoherent to deny the reality of this shared social and cultural domain, as such a denial is possible only through the symbolic resources afforded by our social heritage.

And yet there is something decidedly incomplete about this picture. To take physics seriously is to understand that the natural world in which we find ourselves cannot be as it appears. The colors and shapes we see, the sounds we hear, the flavors we taste, and the odors we smell do not exist "out there" in the mind-independent world. Physics teaches us that the universe is composed of infinitesimally tiny quanta or points of bound energy, regulated by four fundamental forces (weak, strong, electromagnetic, and gravitational), and these quanta themselves have no determinate observation-independent identity conditions or locations. Even space and time are not what we naively take them to be—space-time turns out to be a complex manifold that exists in relationship with mass-energy.

Some interpretations of quantum mechanics hold that it is meaningless even to speak of mind-independent physical entities existing at all; we can only speak of probabilities that a particular particle will appear when we go looking for it.

No matter what one's interpretation of quantum mechanics, the particles, the forces, and the space-time continuum are, in and of themselves, devoid of sensible qualities. There thus seems to be an epistemic gap between this objective mind-independent "noumenal" domain and the domain of phenomena—the world of colors, sounds, smells, tastes, feels, and of objects as we experience them. Our experiential world is a representation or construct produced by our neural systems in response to our sensory-motor interactions with our environment. The ability to generate such a representation is, presumably, the result of millions of years of evolution, in which organisms with neural networks that excelled at sensing, mapping, and globally depicting their environs were afforded a selective advantage. At some point in evolutionary history, as a result of increases in neurological complexity, some of these organisms moved from being conscious to being self-conscious, from being aware to being self-aware.

But this can't be quite right either. For if we have determined that sensible qualities such as colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels can't exist in the mind-independent material world, then what sense is there in saying they exist in the brain? After all, the brain is just more physical stuff—a complex bundle of some 20 or 30 billion neurons, connected via long protoplasmic fibers (axons) that transmit electrochemical pulses (action potentials) across some 100 trillion junction points (synapses). How, one might ask, could electro-chemical interactions in the brain, no matter how complex, give rise to phenomenal experience, in all its luminous vibrancy? Conscious experience does not appear, from the inside, to be the sort of thing that could inhere in a material substrate.

We therefore seem forced to conclude that the inner life through which the external world is disclosed is not composed of, or

constituted by, material stuff. Whatever mind or consciousness is, it is hard to imagine how it could be physical; yet it is this non-physical something that is most intimately available and known to us. (Descartes would claim that it is the only thing known to us indubitably.) Hence the external physical world that is the subject of empirical scientific inquiry—the material domain that includes the physical body and brain—is only available to us as a mental construct or representation. Any attempt to step outside of this representation—to imagine a world existing apart from our construal of it—can only yield another construal. This line of thought takes us down the path to idealism; to the view that there is nothing beyond our mental representations.[1]

And yet the very thought that it is impossible to grasp the noumenal domain that lies beyond representation—the idea that the phenomenal world in which we find ourselves is a mental construct or representation—is itself made possible by intellectual and symbolic resources (language, culture, philosophy) that are *extrinsic* to me. This semiotic scaffolding must already be in place—it must precede my being—for conceptual thought and reflection to occur. Moreover, this scaffolding can only be understood as emerging from complex social, evolutionary, and biological processes that extend back millennia, ultimately to the big bang. So we seem to have looped back to where we started, with a physicalist conception of the human condition.[2]

Philosophers, both Eastern and Western, have been running this loop for centuries. They seem confronted with a choice between two competing positions that appear to be incompatible, if not contradictory; between, for example, a physicalist account that privileges the material world, and a phenomenological account that privileges one's experience of said world. In response,

[1] This is the conclusion drawn by Vasubandhu (4th–5th century CE) and Dignāga (6th century) in India as well as by Berkeley and Bradley more recently in the British Isles.

[2] This is the path trodden by the Cārvākas in ancient India and by Quine and other scientific realists of the 20th-century West.

they try to stake out what promises to be the most plausible or compelling position—to locate a handhold in the vortex and hold on for dear life. In clinging to their particular spot of what looks like terra firma, they fail to recognize the ground shifting beneath them. Some, in the course of shoring up their positions, may come to suspect that the irreconcilable perspectives confronting them are in fact interconnected or interdependent. But to explicitly concede as much would be to release one's handhold and slip into the vortex. We can reduce mind to world, or world to mind, but to do both at once would be to countenance paradox.

Philosophers sometimes speak of the two opposing positions as the first-person or subjective point of view, and the third-person or objective point of view. The first-person perspective privileges one's personal experience of the world. One finds oneself at the center of the universe—the "still point of the turning world"—peering outward. Some philosophers, notably phenomenologists in the tradition of Husserl, insist that all philosophical inquiry must begin here, with one's immediate experience, since the world does not show up at all unless and until it shows up for someone. Without mind, without conscious awareness, there is no science, no physics, no biology, no evolution, and, indeed, no mind-independent "external world" to speak of. If my construal of the universe fails to recognize and incorporate the fact that it is indeed *my* construal, then there is something amiss philosophically. As the phenomenological perspective takes the immediacy of subjective experience as the proper starting point for philosophical inquiry, it threatens to result in idealism.

The third-person perspective begins with the premise that the very point of critical scientific and philosophical inquiry is to escape the epistemic limitations, inherent biases, and parochialism, not to mention the lurking idealism, that bedevil the first-person perspective. The resources available to us—empirical science, experimental psychology, logic and philosophical reflection—offer a means to escape the limitations of subjectivism. Thomas Nagel

(1986) has dubbed this third-person point of view the "view from nowhere"—a detached account of the world that floats above individual vantage points. The nagging worry is how this view from nowhere can accommodate, without reduction, the multifarious views from somewhere, that is, the phenomena of mind and subjective experience.

The contrast and disjunction between these two perspectives cannot be overstated. From the first-person perspective, the material world appears to be begotten by, and shows up in, mind, and thus mind is epistemically prior. From the third-person perspective, mind is begotten by, and shows up in, the material universe; hence, epistemic priority is accorded to the world of the physical sciences. Each position is warranted by cogent philosophical argument as well as by compelling metaphysical intuitions. Yet, taken on their own terms, each seems somehow deficient or incomplete. Each, it would seem, is antithetical to, yet inextricably dependent upon, the other.

Thomas Nagel has explored this interdependency at length in *The View from Nowhere* (Nagel 1986). In Nagel's analysis, to be human involves simultaneously navigating, or shuttling between, these two irreconcilable perspectives:

> The uneasy relation between inner and outer perspectives, neither of which we can escape, makes it hard to maintain a coherent attitude toward the fact that we exist at all, toward our deaths, and toward the meaning or point of our lives, because a detached view of our own existence, once achieved, is not easily made part of the standpoint from which life is lived. From far enough outside my birth seems accidental, my life pointless, and my death insignificant, but from inside my never having been born seems nearly unimaginable, my life monstrously important, and my death catastrophic. Though the two viewpoints clearly belong to one person—these problems wouldn't arise if they didn't—they function independently enough so that each can come as something

> of a surprise to the other, like an identity that has been temporarily forgotten.[3]

Nagel argues against philosophers' drive to resolve the tension by reducing one perspective to the other. These days, influenced by the success of modern science, many analytic philosophers lean toward the materialist or naturalist stance, which takes the third-person position as epistemically foundational. They must then account for how mind and consciousness can emerge (or appear to emerge) from insentient matter. There are many approaches to this quandary that range from top-down emergentism on the one side to eliminativism on the other, with various flavors of reductionism in between. Whatever their view of mind, the materialists concur that the physical or mind-independent universe precedes—logically, temporally, and ontologically—whatever subjective access one may have to it, and any philosophical account that fails to recognize this is doomed from the get-go.

Phenomenologists tack in the opposite direction. They counter that a naturalized third-person account of the world will never be able to accommodate, much less explain, the luminous immediacy of subjective awareness. The third-person stance, they claim, is achieved at the cost of effacing the very thing that makes such a stance possible, namely, mind. Thus we have no viable choice but to approach the world in terms of the phenomenal appearances through which it is known.

Understanding and negotiating the gap between these two perspectives has proven to be challenging. Nagel argues that it is futile to try to resolve the conflict. Instead, he advocates holding "the opposition clearly in one's mind without suppressing either element" (Nagel 1986: 6). His writing can be seen as an attempt to keep both balls in the air at the same time:

[3] Nagel 1986: 209.

> Although the world is not essentially my world, the objective recognition of my contingency has to coexist in my head with a total world picture whose subject is inescapably me. The person whose contingency I recognize is the epicenter not just of the world as it looks from here, but of my entire world view. To suppose that he should never have existed is to suppose that my world should never have existed.
>
> This makes it seem as if the existence of my world depends on the existence of something in it. But of course that is not the case. The real me is not merely part of my world. The person who I am is a contingent bit of a world that is not just mine. So my world depends for its existence on me, I depend for my existence on [Tom Nagel], and [Tom Nagel] depends on the world and is inessential to it. This is another of the discomforts of being someone in particular: my world depends for its existence on his birth, even though he also appears in it as a character. It is eerie to see oneself and one's entire world in this way as a natural product.[4]

In his efforts to maintain, at one and the same time, both of these incommensurable if not antithetical perspectives, Nagel confronts the specter of paradox. But he remains undeterred.

> The aim of such understanding . . . is to go beyond the distinction between appearance and reality by including the existence of appearances in an elaborated reality. Nothing will then be left outside. But this expanded reality, like physical reality, is centerless. Though the subjective features of our own minds are at the center of our world, we must try to conceive of them as just one manifestation of the mental in a world that is not given especially to the human point of view. This is, I recognize,

[4] Nagel 1986: 213.

> a paradoxical enterprise, but the attempt seems to me worth making.[5]

In other words, the subjective and objective perspectives constitute two poles of an antinomy; they are not merely interdependent but also subsume and enfold one another. The very thought that I am the subject of experience is only possible through concepts, ideas, and language that are extrinsic to me. Yet these extrinsic factors are dependent on my existence. The world is within me, and I am within the world. And it is impossible to specify where one perspective ends and the other begins; they fold back upon one another seamlessly, like the two sides of a Möbius strip.

* * *

As we have explored in this short book, the entangled relationship between first- and third-person perspectives was familiar to the Chinese from at least the time of the *Zhuangzi*. To give a single but telling example, in the "Discussion on Leveling Things" (*Qiwulun* 齊物論), Zhuangzi writes:

> Everything has its "that," and everything has its "this." From the point of view of "that" nothing is seen, but from knowing oneself one knows it. So I say, "that" comes out of "this" and "this" depends on "that"—which is to say that "this" and "that" give rise to one another.[6]

[5] Nagel 1986: 18. See also his comments on absurdity: "It is one thing to recognize the limitations that inevitably come from occupying a particular position in the history of a culture; it is another to convert these into nonlimitations by embracing a historicism which says there is no truth except what is internal to a particular historical standpoint. I think that here, as elsewhere, we are stuck with the clash of standpoints. Absurdity comes with the territory, and what we need is the will to put up with it" (Nagel 1986: 11). Nagel makes explicit references to paradox elsewhere in the book, sometimes negatively (as in his discussion of idealism), and sometimes as something unavoidable; see pp. 95, 97, 179, 180, and 181.

[6] 物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也 (trans. Watson 1968: 29, with changes).

Zhuangzi calls our attention to the fact that the *other* (the "that") is a construct or projection of the self (the "this"), yet this self emerges only against the backdrop of the other. This dialectic, driven by a logic of mutual dependence and entailment, generates a conundrum: does it make sense to speak of a *relationship* without *relata*? This venerable puzzle bedevils much of Buddhist metaphysics, from Abhidharma to Madhyamaka, and it spills over into strands of contemporary philosophy, from Whitehead's process philosophy (in which there is process without any *thing* that undergoes change), to top-down theories of mind and consciousness (in which mind is an emergent entity with causal properties that are not reducible to those of its neural substrate). But the more pressing problem, we contend, is not one of mere mutual entailment or codependence; it is, rather, how two mutually opposed and indeed incommensurate perspectives—each of which exists only through *occluding* the other—can simultaneously generate and enfold the other within themselves.

One might be tempted to argue that the problem is merely sophistic—that it pertains to the limitations of language, thought, and expression, and not to reality as such. That language ties itself in knots at its limits does not mean that reality itself is knotted. But the distinction between concept, language, and thought on the one side, and reality or world on the other, simply reproduces the distinction between first- and third-person perspectives, so it will not do to insist that the problem lies within the third-person linguistically constructed other, and that it doesn't redound on the first-person subject. (Wittgenstein makes precisely this point when he writes: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.")[7] The paradox, in other words, is not merely analytic. It is existential.

To see what we mean by this, consider the phenomenological "experiments" devised by Douglas Harding, who is famous for his insistence that he has no head. (To understand Harding is to

[7] Wittgenstein 1974: 65, §5.6.

understand that Harding means this *literally*; see Harding 1986.) Harding has devised a number of stratagems to demonstrate that you too are headless. He intends these, as Husserl intended the *epoché*, to help us attend to our lived first-person experience unencumbered by the third-person "natural attitude"—our deeply engrained and largely unexamined metaphysical presuppositions and habits of mind. Harding's most effective technique is also his simplest: point your finger directly at the point between your own two eyes, and then observe carefully, without preconceptions, what your finger is pointing at.

If undertaken seriously, this experiment can be quite jarring, although it is not easy to describe precisely what one sees, or what one doesn't see. Of course, I see the tip of my finger clearly enough, hovering in the center of my field of vision, but as to what it is pointing at—well, it doesn't seem to be pointing at anything at all. Initially, I am tempted to say that it is pointing at a void, or at nothing, or at *me*, yet these responses seem to miss the mark, as there is nothing particularly empty or me-like about it. Rather, my finger seems to be pointing at the center of my visual field—the center of the world—which is odd since we normally think of the world as "out there," in the opposite direction of where my finger is pointing.

I look down and see my torso, arms, and legs, extending out from this place where my head should be, yet my torso is not *outside* this gap which is not a gap, but inside—inside me! The external world, including my own physical body (or at least as much of it as appears—my head is missing) seems to be enfolded into *me*, and this *me* extends out and fills the world. The topography of this space is akin to the twisting of a Möbius strip, which is simultaneously one-sided and two-sided, which is to say that it is impossible to determine where the subject ends and the object begins. Note that we are not alluding to some kind of transcendent or mystical experience—just our ordinary workaday visual field. Yet noticing how one's visual field loops around on itself can instill a sense of

vertigo, or, to borrow a term from Heidegger (who borrowed it from Freud), a sense of the uncanny (*unheimlich*). The handholds are gone.

Harding calls this space where my head should be the "Aware Space." It is, perhaps, what Kojève and Merleau Ponty refer to as the "hole in being," or what Heidegger calls the "clearing" (*Lichtung*) through which *Dasein* is disclosed, or what Sartre calls the "nothingness" (*néant*) that allows "being-for-itself" (*être-pour-soi*) to withdraw from "being-in-itself" (*être-en-soi*). In Zen it is known as one's "original face" (*benlai mianmu* 本來面目). These expressions are all attempts to refer, if obliquely, to something immediately present to us—nothing could be more intimately known.[8] Yet at the same time, these terms neither denote a *thing* in the world nor even a place or space or gap *within* the world. (And how much less could it exist *apart* from the world.) These terms rather suggest the perfect *coincidence* of subject and object.

Wittgenstein seems to have this in mind when, in the *Tractatus*, he speaks of the subject not as something that belongs to the world, but rather as the "limit of the world":

> Where *in* the world is a metaphysical object to be found? You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye. And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.[9]

In his commentary on this passage, David Pears writes that "the unity and coherence of a person's construal of the physical world is . . . the effect of his own dual existence as mind and body in that

[8] The immediacy is seen in the Song edition of the *Platform Sutra*, which is the locus classicus for the "original face" *gong'an*: "Do not think of good; do not think of evil. At just this moment, what is [your] original face?" 不思善，不思惡。正與麼時，那箇是明上座本來面目 (T.2008: 48.349b24–25).

[9] Wittgenstein 1974: 69, §5.632–5.633. On the role of paradox in Wittgenstein's analysis of self and world, see Pears 2006: 96–128.

world. Perhaps he himself is the hinge on which the two worlds, mental and physical, turn" (Pears 2006: 103–104). This hinge—Wittgenstein would speak of it in the *Brown Book* as the "geometric eye"—is the point (imagined, since it is never itself in view) at which inside swallows outside and outside swallows inside.

Wittgenstein's analysis of mind and body, or self and world, was influenced by his reading of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was critical of Kant's categorical distinction between the world of perceptual appearance and the noumenal "thing in itself." Inspired by his reading of the *Upaniṣads*, Schopenhauer argued that this duality, which he refashioned as that between "representation" (*Vorstellung*) and "will" (*Wille*), must be two aspects of a single integrated whole. This singular-yet-dual nature is nowhere more obvious than in one's own body, which appears as one physical object among many, and simultaneously as the unique seat of one's awareness:

> What I am searching for, the meaning of the world that confronts me as a mere representation, and the transition from this world as mere representation of the cognizing subject to whatever it may be besides, could indeed never be discovered if the enquirer were himself nothing more than a pure subject of cognition (a winged cherub's head without a body). But he is rooted in this world and finds himself in it as an individual, i.e. his cognition, which upholds and conditions the entire world as representation, is nonetheless completely mediated through a body whose affections, as we have shown, are the starting point for the understanding as it intuits this world. To the pure subject of cognition as such, this body is a representation like any other, an object among objects: to this extent, the subject is familiar with its movements and its actions in the same way he is familiar with the alterations that take place in other objects of intuition; and these movements would be just as foreign and incomprehensible as these other objects if their meaning were not unriddled in an

> entirely different way. Otherwise the pure subject of cognition would see his own actions as following from motives presented to him with the constancy of a natural law, just like the alterations that occur in other objects due to causes, stimuli and motives. But he would not understand the motives' influence any more intimately than he would understand the connection between any other effect and its cause. He would have no understanding of the inner essence of his body's actions and expressions; he would refer to this essence variously as a force, a quality, or a character, but he would have no more insight than this. But none of this is the case: rather the subject of cognition, appearing as an individual, is given the solution to the riddle: and this solution is will. This and this alone gives him the key to his own appearance, reveals to him the meaning and shows him the inner workings of his essence, his deeds, his movements.[10]

Schopenhauer refers to the manner in which "object coincides with subject, i.e., ceases to be an object," as the "miracle par excellence" (Schopenhauer 2010: 126). In his analysis of this miracle—his effort to convey the identity of will and body—Schopenhauer's writing assumes a dialectical or looping structure. Circularity is unavoidable, since this identity,

> can only be established by raising immediate consciousness, concrete cognition, to rational knowledge or transferring it to abstract cognition. On the other hand, by its nature it can never be demonstrated, i.e. derived as mediate cognition from some other immediate source, precisely because it is itself the most immediate cognition there is; if we do not grasp it as such and keep hold of it we will wait in vain to get it back again somehow in a mediate way, as derived cognition.[11]

[10] Schopenhauer 2010: 123–124.
[11] Schopenhauer 2010: 127.

The juxtaposition of antithetical positions in Schopenhauer's writing—the repeated use of "on the one hand . . . on the other"—recalls that of Nagel. Both philosophers, although separated in time and philosophical style, were struggling to articulate the fact that to perceive at all is to perceive from within and from without at one and the same time.

The Indian philosopher Krishnahandra Bhattacharyya (1875–1949) also tried to make sense of the contradictory structure of the relationship between subject and object. Like Schopenhauer, Bhattacharyya was inspired by non-dualist strands of Indian philosophy, and his writing too careens between two irreconcilable positions:

> The materialistic view that the subject is but the body is true insofar as the body represents a stage of being of the subject. But it ignores the unique singularity of one's own body even as a perceived object. No merely objectivist account can do justice to this singularity. The objectivity of other perceived objects is constituted by their position relative to the percipient's body, which itself, therefore, cannot be taken to be so constituted. To the percipient, the body is an object situated relatively to some other percipient's body as imagined, being not perceived by himself in a space-position though not known, therefore, as non-spatial. The percipient as in his body or as his body is in this sense, dissociated from the external world, being what his perceived world is distinct from. At the same time he cannot help imagining himself as included in the world though it may be as a privileged object. . . . One's own body is not only perceived from the outside; one is immediately or sensuously aware of it also from within in what is called feeling of the body. This feeling is not, like the feeling of an object, a psychic fact from which the object known is distinguished. The bodily feeling is but the felt body, which is not known to be other than the perceived body. Yet the perceived body is distinct from it so far as it is an "interior"

> that is never perceived and cannot be imagined to be perceived from the outside.[12]

Many in the European continental tradition, writing around the same time as Bhattacharyya, were struggling with the same existential conundrum, most notably Heidegger and Sartre. But the most sustained and insightful analysis of the mutual enfolding of mind and world, inside and outside, may be that of Merleau-Ponty. His *Phenomenology of Perception* is, in large part, an analysis of the body as simultaneously "for-itself" and "in-itself."

Merleau-Ponty, like Harding, ponders the gap or void on top of one's shoulders where one's head should be. And as with Harding, Merleau-Ponty holds that we fail to notice this gap because we have substituted the *idea* of the body for the *experience* of the body:

> In the matter of living appearance, my visual body includes a large gap at the level of the head, but biology was there ready to fill that gap, to explain it through the structure of the eyes, to instruct me in what the body really is, showing that I have a retina and a brain like other men and like the corpses which I dissect, and that, in short, the surgeon's instrument could infallibly bring to light in this indeterminate zone of my head the exact replica of plates illustrating the human anatomy. I apprehend my body as a subject-object, as capable of 'seeing' and 'suffering', but these confused representations were so many psychological oddities, samples of a magical variety of thought the laws of which are studied by psychology and sociology and which has its place assigned to it by them, in the system of the real world, as an object of scientific investigation. This imperfect picture of my body, its marginal presentation, and its equivocal status as touching and touched, could not therefore be *structural* characteristics of the body itself; they did not affect the idea of it; they became

[12] Bhattacharyya 1930: 92–93, 95.

> 'distinctive characteristics' of those *contents* of consciousness which make up our representation of the body: these contents are consistent, affective and strangely duplicated in 'double sensations', but apart from this the representation of the body is a representation like any other and correspondingly the body is an object like any other.[13]

Merleau-Ponty continued to ponder these issues after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*. His later posthumously published writings, which appeared as *The Visible and the Invisible*, return to the experience of "our reversible flesh" as a fold that is at once subject and object. "The invisible," he writes, "is a hollow in the visible, a fold in passivity, not pure production" (1968: 235), and "there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another" (1968: 264):

> No longer are there essences above us, like positive objects, offered to a spiritual eye; but there is an essence beneath us, a common nervure of the signifying and the signified, adherence in and reversibility of one another—as the visible things are the secret folds of our flesh, and yet our body is one of the visible things. (1968: 118)

Merleau-Ponty, like Schopenhauer and Bhattacharyya, is struggling with the most fundamental existential predicament one faces as an embodied subject: I both *am* and *have* a body; I am both within and without the world; I am one among many, and at the same time I am the singular clearing through which the many appear. (Merleau-Ponty is fascinated by the fact that we can touch ourselves.) When logic seems to fail him, Merleau-Ponty reaches for an image and suggests "fold" and "hollow."

[13] Merleau-Ponty 2005: 82.

We might be tempted to read images like Pear's "hinge" (or our "Möbius strip"), in terms of double-aspect theory, that is, as implying that there is a single underlying substance—call it "god" or "brahman" or "buddha-nature"—that presents itself in two ways. But for precisely this reason, such images are misleading. They tame things—flatten things out—so as to suggest a logically coherent picture, a stable handhold, a place to take a stand, and this is precisely what we don't have. We are not confronted with a single enfolded continuum, but with something that, at least according to standard logic, is logically impossible. Instead of imagining a fold or a hinge, think of Escher's famous lithograph "Drawing Hands" (1948), in which two hands are depicted in the process of drawing one another into existence. But this image too fails to do justice to the peculiarity of our situation, as Escher depicts two three-dimensional hands emerging from a flat surface. One must rather imagine the hands drawing themselves into existence out of nothing. Which is to say, the conundrum concerns not merely the manner in which the subject, or mind, or conscious awareness emerges from or within the world, but the manner in which the world simultaneously comes into being from or within mind.

* * *

We submit that the following pair of statements are incontestable:

a. The world exists independently of my cognitive apparatus.
b. The world does not exist independently of my cognitive apparatus.

There might be a temptation to parameterize "world" in these statements as follows:

a. The *real* or *mind-independent* world exists independently of my cognitive apparatus.
b. The world *of my experience* does not exist independently of my cognitive apparatus.

But as we have seen, this will not do, as it is impossible to disambiguate self and world, subject and object, inside and outside, and thus, rather than resolve the contradiction, the parameterization simply relocates it. (See Chapter 5 on Chan Cases.) The world is real and autonomous and irreducible; mind emerges within, and is subsumed by, the world. But mind is also real and autonomous and irreducible, and the world emerges within, and is subsumed by, mind. It is impossible to identify where the for-itself ends and the in-itself begins—they enfold each other seamlessly.

The discipline of logic emerged in the ancient world (both Western and Eastern) as the handmaiden to rhetoric. That is to say, it was not initially considered a means of arriving at truth so much as a means of persuading others of the truth of one's position. In time, for better or worse, logic came to be regarded as something more: as a formidable tool to probe the nature of reality. But if reality itself is contradictory—if being a something or a someone entails a kind of looping reflexivity in which I bring forth the world and the world brings forth me—then a logic that categorically repudiates paradox is inadequate to the task.

Some philosophers in the West—Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Nagel, for example—have flirted with paradox in their attempts to trace the contours of the self/world divide.[14] Differences aside, they all share a desire to move beyond both physicalism and idealism; neither standpoint can yield, on its own, a coherent or internally consistent picture of the world. But their analyses remain constrained by prevailing philosophical attitudes that spurn paradox—to come out as a dialetheist is to risk ceasing to be taken seriously in the academy. The East Asian

[14] Indeed, the history of Western philosophy can be told as a history of philosophers coming up against paradox and then, somewhat desperately, looking for a way out; see Priest 2002.

philosophers we have examined in this volume go beyond flirting; they actively embrace paradox, regarding it not as something to be avoided but something to be explored and understood. For precisely this reason, it may be time to reassess both their thinking and our own.

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